

BISEXUAL LIVES



Bisexual Lives (1988)

BISEXUAL LIVES CAME OUT OF THE SECOND BICON, "THE 2ND Politics of Bisexuality Conference" in 1985. It was mostly written by the time of the 4th National Bisexual Conference in 1986, and finally published in 1988.

I think two thousand copies were printed. At one point, I had about ten copies, thanks to finding them cheaply in second-hand bookshops etc. Most found new homes at later BiCons, but when someone wanted a copy at some point around 2004, I didn't have any spares, so I scanned and OCR'd it, then turned it into HTML. It had a secret life at ukbi.info for a while, before that expired. Bi History Month seems a good time to republish it.

I've had permission to republish this from everyone I could track down back in 2004 (most of them!) ..

.. with the exception of one person..

.. who always used a pseudonym for their bi community stuff..

.. but still said no.

I'll see if I can get an edited version they are happy with.

I've added some annotations at the bottom of a couple of pages. These weren't in the original, or the previous web version. What's not (yet) been added are the portraits of the various contributors.



Back cover text:

"We are not sitting on the fence.

We are building a new garden."

Bisexuals are people who experience a desire for emotional, sensual or sexual relationships with people of both sexes. There are an enormous number of them in the world. This book contains a collection of short pieces written by bisexual women and men about their experiences of what it is like to be bisexual.

I've never much cared for the term 'Bisexual' – it's been a cop-out for too long by those afraid to openly call themselves 'Lesbian' or 'Gay'." To the queerbasher any man who sleeps with other men is a 'poof'. Why argue? I've always been quite happy to stand up and be counted as homosexual. The hell with fine distinctions, I thought – let's unite and fight.

"But bisexuality is a different way of relating, as I've slowly discovered over the years, defying rigid black-and-white definitions. Unite and fight isn't

that simple when you live with a member of the opposite sex. Nowadays while still considering myself gay, and glad (AIDS notwithstanding) I find I've also become – emotionally speaking – glad to be grey!

Tom Robinson (11.2.87)

"Only when it is recognised that the territories of hetero- and homosexuals do, in fact, overlap can a new era of tolerance begin. The time will come when the fact that every human is bisexual is understood and accepted. It will come when the present permissive and obsessive society is transformed into a relaxed, understanding and knowledgeable one."

Charlotte Wolff

(*Love Between Women*, Duckworth 1971)

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Introduction

Introduction

'(T HERE ARE NOT) TWO DISCREET POPULATIONS, heterosexual and homosexual only the human mind invents categories and tries to force fact into separated pigeon-holes

The sooner we learn this concerning sexual behaviour, the sooner we shall reach a sound understanding of the realities of sex.' This is quoted from the Alfred Kinsey Report relating to the USA in 1948. It identified a spectrum of sexual orientation with the experiences and attractions of a third of all adults being between the extremes of exclusive heterosexuality and homosexuality.

We, the Off Pink Collective, are a group who identify as bisexual. We have produced this book because there is a need for greater understanding about bisexuality – it is part of so many people's lives whether openly or covertly.

Since the Kinsey Report the widespread extent of bisexuality has been confirmed or found to be even greater by subsequent surveys among men in both the USA and Britain. Among women by comparison the *Hite Nationwide Study of Female Sexuality* (1976 also in the USA) showed 8 per cent of women preferred sex with other women and another 9 per cent had sexual experiences with both sexes. This lower percentage may reflect the

survey methods and the age of the survey sample, but there do seem to be fewer actively bisexual women than men. We think this is due to greater pressure in society for women to conform and be sexually passive as well as their tendency to be more restricted economically, in mobility and by domestic responsibilities. Yet our experience from meetings, conferences and counselling is that women are intrinsically no less bisexual than men.

A great deal also depends on definitions. There has always been diverse sexual behaviour but the categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality have only comparatively recently been defined. Both these groups now present their identities as rigidly defined. These are hard to break down on either side and yet it is clear that such a fixed choice does not fit the natural tendencies and experiences of many people. The current rising divorce rate may show that we are not primarily a monogamous society in spite of social pressures to be 'straight' and get married. Fulfilment comes, not from acting out set patterns, but by being true to ourselves.

It is very difficult to agree a definition of bisexuality. Each person experiences their sexuality differently and we feel it is right to fully acknowledge this. It is quite usual for the balance of a person's sexual preferences to change and evolve continuously for many reasons. Relationships may be emotional and/or physical, contemporaneous or consecutive. The emphasis should be on a fluid sexuality rather than a fixed one. Bisexuals are people who are not or have not been exclusively gay, lesbian or heterosexual. To be bisexual is to have the potential to be open emotionally and sexually to people as people, regardless of their gender.

The emergence of the Lesbian and Gay Movement has led to the publication of hundreds of studies on all aspects of the lives of gay men and lesbians. Yet the literature on bisexuality is minimal. Novels and television, for example, have concentrated on characters who are exclusively lesbian, gay or heterosexual. Famous people, artists and writers have been claimed as lesbian or gay after years or even centuries of censorship by biographers who have omitted mention of homosexuality.

In this process the possibility that many people concerned were bisexual has been ignored. In his book *The Bisexual Option* Fred Klein^[1] has at last begun the process of identifying bisexual people from history and the arts: Alexander the Great, Somerset Maugham, Janis Joplin, Francis Bacon, Julius Caesar, Colette, Shakespeare, Edward II, Elton John, Socrates, Oscar Wilde and Virginia Woolf are just some of the bisexual people in his hall of fame.

Charlotte Wolff's *Bisexuality: a Study* is still the only book on the subject which is widely available in Britain. Besides an exhaustive review of the concept of bisexuality in works on sexuality from Ancient Greece to the present day, a large part of the book is taken up with her conclusions drawn from a study of bisexual people, 75 women and 75 men. This and a selection of other books are listed at the end of this volume.

Despite these few books the subject remains obscured and misinformation abounds. One common idea is that any sign of homosexuality means that a person is completely homosexual and any heterosexuality is entirely a pretence. Others are that bisexuality is a state of indecision, merely a transitory period during a change of permanent sexual orientation, or that it is a fashion linked to androgynous personalities such as David Bowie or Boy George. Too often bisexuals are simply thought of as irresponsible or promiscuous or oversexed. To work towards changing these views is one purpose of this book. Another is to give support and encouragement to people to explore their true sexuality.

We express solidarity with gays and lesbians against the widespread image of heterosexuality as the norm, but we need greater reciprocation. The view of bisexuals as opting out of the struggle for lesbian and gay rights is a strongly held one. Now there are new pressures against bisexuals as a bridging group for the spread of AIDS.

The long term answer is a more balanced approach in schools from the earliest stages to develop in children a greater freedom of personal choice and awareness. But as we go to press the prospects for more positive

attitudes in education towards homosexuality and bisexuality are bleak for the foreseeable future. The new Government policy on sex education in the circular of September 1987 states 'there is no place in any school in any circumstances for teaching which advocates homosexual behaviour, which presents it as the "norm" or which encourages homosexual experimentation by pupils'. Commenting on this policy in her closing speech at the Conservative Party Annual Conference in October 1987, Mrs. Thatcher said 'children, who need to be taught to respect traditional moral values, are being taught that they have an inalienable right to be gay'.

Thus the small advances made by the GLC, ILEA and especially the London Borough of Haringey in presenting positive images of homosexuality and homosexual relationships are eliminated at a stroke. But whilst the Minister for Education is trying to outlaw any mention of gay sex he also says there must be education on the danger of AIDS. Surely the best way of achieving this is to teach about responsible gay sex rather than trying to ignore it, so that it remains a furtive and covert activity.

It is not only in education that current legislation is threatening to restrict freedom. At the time of going to press, the Local Government Bill is passing through Parliament. The hurriedly inserted Clause 28, if accepted without modification, will have potentially far-reaching effects both in preventing the teaching of the acceptability of homosexuality in maintained schools and in stopping local authorities from 'promoting' or assisting in the 'promotion' of homosexuality. By extension this means bisexuality too.

What is meant by 'promotion' has not been made clear, but interpreted strictly this would include the entire range of publicising and financing activities and facilities which support and combat oppression of lesbians and gay men, such as help lines, equal opportunities policies and the licensing of lesbian and gay centres and clubs. It may even be construed in law as banning gay literature (including Oscar Wilde, Graham Greene and many others) from libraries, and plays and films which show sympathetic

gay characters from the stage and screen. In short, it could go a long way towards reversing the gains that have been made since the 1967 Sexual Offences Act.

Bisexuality is a fact of human existence and the demand for a bisexual identity has been shown very clearly in recent years with the appearance of bisexual support groups across North America, in Europe, and several in the UK, including the London Group set up in 1981. Five very successful national conferences have been held in London and Edinburgh, the counselling service and phone line have answered thousands of letters and calls, and *Bi-Monthly* magazine has been published with a world-wide distribution for four years. Further considerable progress has been made in the US where many publications now refer to 'lesbians, gay men and bisexuals' rather than just 'lesbians and gay men.' We have a long way to go in the UK to reach that stage, but if we are to do so we have to join forces with the gay community in fighting the present regressive attitudes. We hope this book will play a part.

The Off Pink Collective January 1988

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Notes

1 The name Fritz Klein used for his first books.

About ourselves and the book

ABOUT OURSELVES AND THIS BOOK

BISEXUAL LIVES WAS CONCEIVED AS A PROJECT AT A discussion group at the Second National Bisexual Conference^[1] at the London Lesbian and Gay Centre in April 1985. Originally an interview format was constructed around a number of very general questions drafted at this initial meeting. Subsequently many of the accounts turned out to be autobiographical profiles.

The Collective began as nine people, all bisexual, with another two offering to help with the artwork, but there has been a considerable turnover of personnel for various reasons, mostly personal. However, we have tried to keep a balance of the sexes and generally this has been achieved. We started off with one person as the central contact, but most of the time meetings were rotated round members' homes, as was the chairing of meetings and responsibility for most aspects of our work. The project has taken much longer than we ever expected, but our common aim has kept us going and we have learned a great deal in the process.

We have brought together the diverse stories of seven women and five men, presented in their own words and welcomed others to contribute brief comments and experiences on a variety of subjects; these comments are interspersed between the profiles. The sex of the writer is shown thus:

[Venus symbol – text coloured pink in this copy] or [Mars symbol – text coloured blue in this copy]. We have also approached the subject of AIDS and how bisexuals are being affected by it and appended a bibliography and other information which we hope will be of use.

The contributors all identify as bisexual, though they are not as representative in terms of age, race and background as we would like. Nevertheless, we hope that this book will act as a springboard for further thought and discussion leading to a fuller understanding of bisexuality as a viable and positive option in people's lives.

The Off Pink Collective: Clare Thompson, Cris Stevens, Guy Chapman, Matthew Milne, Pink Dandelion, Sarah McGhee, Zaidie Parr.

With grateful thanks to: Amanda Harrington, Andy Beech, Brian MacGowran, Christa Gausden, David Burkle, David Smith, Gail Chester, Geoff Appleton, Iain Richmond, Kate Burkle, Kate Fearnley, Liz Berryman, Madeleine Slade, Mike Blackmore, Sally Elstub, Sipi Hameenaho, Terry Sanderson, and many others who have given us so much assistance in writing and advising and who have donated or loaned the money which has made the realisation of this project possible.

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Notes

- 1 Known at the time as the "2nd Politics of Bisexuality Conference", by 1986 BiCon was known as the 'National Bisexual Conference'. The first one called 'BiCon' was the seventh one in 1989.

Bisexuality

Bisexuality

I' **D RATHER BE BISEXUAL HALF THE TIME THAN HETEROSEXUAL**
all the time.

It is entirely for me as an individual to decide exactly where my attraction may lie and for nobody else to insist that I conform to their specifications. Bisexuality for me has nothing to do with 'swinging'; it is about the ability to respond to someone without the obligation to leave well alone because of gender.

We must not think of ourselves as second class gays, but as first class people. No bisexual I have ever known thought of themselves as a second class straight.

We are not sitting on the fence – we are building a new garden.

If people could only accept that sexuality is infinitely variable and that it was never meant to be confined to the parameters it has been, then not only would MY life be easier but the world would become a much better place.

Like many people I was so scared of my own gay feelings that I found it easier to dislike in others what I disliked in myself. Looking back I must not criticise myself because the anger I felt then was protective in keeping safe a part of me I could not handle. I found that liking men did not alter my

feelings towards women. In fact I got on better with women because I was more relaxed.

A heterosexual lover once said that she would always love the part of me that could belong to her, but she understood that to possess me entirely would be to smother the essential 'me' that made me so dear.

I feel VERY bisexual at the moment and very positive. I just wish there were more bisexuals around and that non-bisexuals would accept my choices more.

So what if I WAS sexually attracted to men as well as women? Did it make me any less of a human being? Was my friend any less of a human being for being gay? Why did I feel that intolerance towards gays was intolerance towards me? I wasn't gay. I loved women too, but if you loved men at all you were a 'poof' or a 'queer' and that meant you were dirty and that you couldn't love women. I mean, NO ONE is going to believe you can like both and not be 'confused'. I've fantasised about men and women so much that I wouldn't know which I preferred.

Since heterosexuality is so ingrained in the prevailing consciousness, it becomes almost impossible to get some heterosexuals to recognise that any valid alternatives exist. I think the word 'normal' was created by those people who are afraid to say 'heterosexual' just because their fear of the body is such that they dare not admit to sexual feelings.

I've always seen myself identified as loving both sexes. Until I came across the term bisexual I was a long time without a label. I've very ambiguous feelings about labels but despite the misconceptions about bisexuality, saying I'm bisexual seems less of a non-statement than saying I'm neither straight nor lesbian.

Misguided assumptions have slowly been strangling my sexuality since birth. Can people conceive of the damage they do with their simple 'well-worn' phrases and their bland assumptions? How much growth have I myself stunted in other people by my unthinking repetition of inherited

heterosexual prejudice?

For me, being bisexual is part of being open to myself. I have always tried to see things from both sides. I don't understand why more people don't acknowledge that both men and women are sexy. I guess it's because I like people.

My preference is only for individuals; I fancy some and I don't fancy others. I can get up in a morning, wander down the street and see maybe thirty I fancy, some men and some women.

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Kate Fearnley

'I WANT BISEXUALITY TO BE A STRONG, POLITICAL AND POSITIVE IDENTITY'

Kate Fearnley, 25

I’VE NEVER BEEN STRAIGHT I WASN’T BORN BISEXUAL OR lesbian either, but as soon as my sexuality began to manifest itself it was clearly not heterosexual.

I remember the games I used to play with my best friend when we were both ten; taking all our clothes off and daring each other to do things which excited us. Once we kidnapped a boy in our class and made him join in, but he didn't seem to get much out of it and apart from the novelty of his anatomy he was quite dull, so we never invited him back. Then my girlfriend moved away to Devon and my sexlife ceased apart from fantasies and masturbation which were a major occupation. When I got to my new school I instantly fell in love with my biology teacher, and soon after that with my new best friend as well. Everyone had crushes, of course – but I don't think they all fantasised sex as I did. I had an hour's journey to and from school, which gave me at least two hours a day of romantic and erotic daydreams.

At about 13 everyone started to get obsessed with boys, apart from me. It was a girls' school, so I didn't meet many boys – though all the others seemed to – and I didn't particularly want to. I just enjoyed the large quantity of lesbian innuendo that flew around the classroom, and the feeling that ran through my body when my knee 'accidentally' touched my friend's as we sat on the desks at break. When the subject came up in conversation with a small group of friends, I said I was bisexual, and so did some of them. It felt rather risqué and daring, and gave me a certain cachet. Not as daring as being a lesbian, which was what I felt I was, but much more trendy and less likely to get me written off.

Then, when I was 16, the girl I was in love with left the school – my feelings for her still unrequited. I went into the sixth form feeling isolated and depressed; but within a few months I'd been seduced by a girl in my year whom I'd hardly noticed before. Our relationship could hardly be called idyllic, confused as it was by her relationship (of two years' standing) with another girl in our year whom I found more attractive ... but it was often fun – sneaking into her bed when I stayed the night and setting the alarm for 5.30 am, going out of bounds in the lunch hour to buy *Gay News*, and going on the Gay Pride March together. Now I knew I was a lesbian.

I didn't tell anyone else while I was at school, apart from the other four lesbians I somehow knew about in my year. I think I just enjoyed being part of such an exclusive little clique...

And then I went to university and made a definite decision to come out. This I did in week one by standing up at teatime in the refectory and announcing to the tableful of new friends 'I must go – GaySoc starts in ten minutes!', and disappearing before I could see their reaction and they could see my red face. When I got to GaySoc everyone was delighted to see me because they were all gay men and felt terribly guilty about there not being any women involved ... so they made me treasurer, and I became Edinburgh's Token Lesbian.

Which made it all the more embarrassing when I suddenly and quite

inadvertently met a MAN – and wanted to SLEEP with him. I tried pretending I only wanted to sleep with him, but I couldn't fool myself for long, despite the memory of a distinctly unsuccessful and unenjoyable 'holiday relationship' with a man I'd once experimented with. So I started what was to turn into a mostly successful three-year relationship with him.

The reactions of my gay friends were most enlightening but very unpleasant. Very few of them could cope with the idea that someone could actually be attracted to people of BOTH sexes. Suddenly I discovered all the unpleasant ideas about bisexuals that exist in the lesbian and gay community. There was I, a seasoned lesbian activist, having done a lot of work in the lesbian and gay movement, suddenly being told that bisexuality is 'just a phase' that people go through on their way to being 'completely' lesbian or gay. I was told that bisexuality is a cop-out, used by people who want to sleep with people of their own sex but don't want to come out, let alone do anything to make it easier for other people. Bisexuals were freeloaders, cashing in on the gains fought for by lesbians and gay men. We were, variously, trendies (really straight), fence-sitters, utopians who claim that EVERYONE is really bisexual and thereby endanger the identities lesbians and gay men have worked so hard to establish, hedonists universally available for sex, pseudo-feminists who are guilty of giving our energy to men, unpolitical and non-existent. From straight society's point of view we were either 'perverts' just like the rest of non-heterosexual society, or, to straight men, a bit of a turn-on, slightly exotic women who were still available to them.

Faced with this barrage I began to have doubts myself. Was I REALLY bisexual? Had I just been under the influence of a single-sex institution when I had my lesbian relationships? Or (on alternate days!) was I just knuckling under to the expectations of straight society by living with a man in an almost marriage-like relationship? I coped with the dilemmas mainly by submersing myself in the relationship. I rarely saw my old gay friends because they were so obviously ill-at-ease with me. Quite WHY the immediate assumption had been that I'd 'gone straight', swung right over to the opposite pole of sexuality, I couldn't understand, but it had.

And then the relationship broke up, painfully, and I was left adrift with none of my old friends and few new ones. After a six-month period of unhappy celibacy and isolation I met some new people, principally a straight (though not militantly so) woman, and two gay men. I still defined myself as bisexual privately, but became involved in lesbian and gay politics again and was too cowardly to tell people. It's pretty disgusting that the Lesbian and Gay Liberation Movement, of all people, should have become so dogmatic as to build another closet for people to hide in, but we have. What changed things for me and for quite a few of the lesbians and gay men I know, was that I began a sexual relationship with a gay man.^[1] Strangely, no-one saw HIM as having gone straight or as a threat to the movement, perhaps because the people we now knew preferred to think about things rather than reject ideas out of hand. We began to think and read about the nature of sexuality and the way that it's socially constructed. There's no way of telling what's the 'natural' way for humans to be, since whatever we are has been affected by the society we live in. Heterosexual and homosexual acts have presumably been around since time immemorial since the physical possibilities of bodies are unlikely to have changed, but the categories of identities of heterosexual and homosexual were only invented relatively recently. Unfortunately, the way they've been constructed as 'normal' and 'not-normal' means that it's been in the interests of lesbians and gay men to construct as strong and positive identities as possible, in order to withstand our oppression by all those people out there who think they are the only image of 'normality'. And it's seemed easiest to do that by polarising sexuality, making a straightforward divide – you're one side or the other but you can't be in the middle, because that confuses the issue. Of course, this false duality doesn't correspond with the experience of a lot of people, but until recently it seemed to me that since the most important fight is still to change straight society that's what I'd concentrate on, even if it meant being less than open about part of myself.

A few things have happened to change and update that view. After a long period of thinking that I was probably the only politically active bisexual in Britain (though how I expected to spot the others since I was still publicly

only a lesbian, I don't know!), I helped organise a Lesbian and Gay Socialist Conference, at which I insisted there should be a workshop on bisexuality. The workshop was intended by about ten people, all but one of whom identified as bisexual. We discussed all the dilemmas of being a bisexual active in the Lesbian and Gay Movement, the feeling that to declare 'I am bisexual' to the world at large didn't feel like a strong enough statement, the way that while we're working towards lesbian and gay liberation, we don't know if it's necessarily going to liberate us. Then at the plenary session we brought some of the discussion to the rest of the conference, and I swung from euphoria at having finally met people like me, to anger because almost all those present glazed over at the very mention of bisexuality as if it wasn't relevant to them, or became openly hostile, with all the usual anti-bisexual arguments. One gay man I'd know for years refused to believe that I could be bisexual, because 'they're all political cop-outs'!

Then I moved to London and got involved in the London Lesbian and Gay Centre. Another manifestation of the 'more right-on than thou' syndrome struck, and bisexual groups were banned from meeting there, for reasons which varied according to who you spoke to and when. There were most of the usual ones plus the idea that lesbians who use the Centre should know they're not being lusted after by a man which I can see, except that there was no Proposal to ban individual bisexuals ('We feel that it's a phase that many people go through on their way to being lesbian or gay' – a management committee member) All this anger crystallised my determination to be militantly bisexual, and to make absolutely SURE that when we finally manage to achieve liberation, it won't be limited to certain ACCEPTABLE types of lesbians and gay men – who never confuse the issue by sleeping with members of the opposite sex, who never indulge in sado-masochism, who always make sure their partners are over the age of consent and who would never CONSIDER crossdressing.

Things are changing, though. A lot of people besides bisexuals are uneasy about the idea of replacing the current sexual orthodoxy with a new one equally rigidly defined. The Politics of Bisexuality conferences^[2] in Britain, other bisexual conferences in the USA and Germany, the Sexual Fringe

Group in London, and lots of non-prescriptive feminist writers in books such as *Politics of Desire* and *Pleasure and Danger* (see bibliography) all combine to make me feel a new direction in sexual liberation. Perhaps we'll eventually achieve a society where it isn't necessary to assert one's difference from 'normality' by adopting a label which while purporting to describe, actually controls and defines us. Until then, I want bisexuality to be a strong, political and positive identity – and it's getting there.

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Notes

- 1 This was probably Stephen Holdsworth – Kate wrote an obituary for him in the *Guardian*.
- 2 Now known as BiCon, the first three all had "politics" in the name. Kate was a main organiser of the third, the first one outside London, and at least three others.

Coming out

Coming Out

EASY AT 17, POSSIBLE AT 28, TOUGH AT 40.

Some people actually physically recoil when I tell them – it's unbelievable.

Lots of 'straight' people never come out to their families or workmates, who if they knew the details of their relatives' or colleagues' lifestyles, would regard them as immoral.

At least it separates the wheat from the chaff, amongst one's friends. You realise who your real friends are at the end of the day.

I was having lunch with a woman. She was definitely a feminist, possibly asexual, a Taurus. Funny – I mentioned I was bisexual and she said 'I don't mind as long as you don't grab my knee under the table.'

Once I'd come out to myself about being gay, the whole world knew with a bang! I loved it It was a different kettle of fish though, telling people I was bisexual. I was absolutely petrified. I'm not afraid any more though.

The high point of coming out is putting the words into someone's ears or mouth but coming out should be seen as something that started in childhood and will go on forever. With every piece of knowledge we gain of

ourselves we have something more to come out with. In coming out I am motivated by two things. On the one hand anger, verging on hate, and on the other the need for dialogue, and for mutual respect.

When I first discovered my lesbian/bisexual side I felt very positive and was very open about it – it was only later I realised my position was not generally accepted. I went through a lot of hiding, then discovered other bisexuals and am now feeling good about it, though isolated.

I've never identified as anything but bisexual – though it took quite a long time to find the term. So, in a sense, I've always been out. But considering assumed heterosexuality then, it was only when I was 17 and started talking about my feelings towards women that I came out. In the 6 years since then, I've been pretty much out to everyone – but people keep trying to push you back into the closet so it's a continuing process.

It's stuffy in the closet.

About 13, I decided to label myself bisexual instead of heterosexual, but only to myself. I never said it to anyone else but also never denied it. (I think because two of my closest friends were gay men and I didn't want to betray them. I never realised that I would be betraying myself also.) At 18 I came out suddenly and dramatically as lesbian to virtually everybody I knew and all within six weeks. I then spent the next three years revelling in new found lesbianism and/or suppressing my heterosexual side (although I think for the first six months I wanted to relate ONLY to women, because for so long I hadn't been able to). Then at 21 I managed, more or less, to accept BOTH (ALL?) (SOME?) sides of my sexuality and come out AGAIN as bisexual I'm changing all the time – wonder what I'll come out with next!

I came out as bi (from heterosexual) to my parents recently in the current climate of AIDS consciousness. Then I told my mother that I had a male bisexual partner and could he visit with me on our way to a holiday. She took it wonderfully because I know that she was surprised. Her foremost worry was AIDS and that I might catch the virus and she didn't understand

why I couldn't just pick one nice person and settle down. But she listened really carefully. She interrupted me once, when I said I was nervous telling her about my life after all these years, to grab my hand and say, 'Don't be silly, I'm unshockable, I want to know', which made me realise that some of my fears about telling her were quite unrealistic. We ended the conversation with me saying, 'I'm trying to read everything I can and learn all I can about AIDS, Mum', and her saying, 'I'll cut out and send you anything I see and tell you anything I hear.' I feel she's being a wonderful support and trying really hard not to judge me for having a different lifestyle to hers.

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David Burkle

'IT IS HIGHLY UNLIKELY THAT I SHALL EVER MEET ANY ONE PERSON WHO COULD FULFIL ALL MY EMOTIONAL, INTELLECTUAL, AND SEXUAL NEEDS'

David Burkle, 45

DAVID BURKLE WAS A FOUNDER MEMBER OF THE LONDON Bisexual Group. For the last six years he has devoted considerable amounts of time to organising meetings, answering enquiries about the group, counselling bisexual people over the phone, representing the group on other bodies such as the Greater London Council Gay Working Party, and generally taking care of the group's correspondence and finances. David was one of the inaugural members of the Bi-Monthly collective and has contributed several articles and reviews to the magazine.

At forty-five David lives with his two daughters in North London. Kate and Jo both have cystic fibrosis and need a special diet, complicated medication, and physiotherapy twice a day. Several years ago he left his job with the family building firm to do a role swap with his wife, Anne. Since then David has stayed at home to have more time to support his daughters, to work on the house and garden, and to do other voluntary work, most recently as a

counsellor at the Terrence Higgins Trust. Two years ago Anne moved out to live alone.

* * * * *

My earliest memories of being bisexual, although I didn't think of it in those terms, date back to boarding school, which I went to at the age of eight. Between ten and thirteen I joined in sexual games with other boys and when I was thirteen the housemaster's eighteen year old daughter got involved as well. This promising start to my sex life was too good to last. At public school there was a lot of talk but not much action. When I was seventeen I was very much in love with the boy in the next room, but we never talked about it and all he seemed to want to do on a physical level was wrestle.

At the same time during the school holidays at home, I was very attracted to the girls in the ballroom dancing classes which I attended. This attraction to women contrasted strongly with the images of homosexuality which I had received from the media. Nothing I read or saw or heard made me think I was a 'homosexual'. (Not that there was very much freely available information in the 1950s. And I was not aware of bisexuality as an option.) However at the same time I wanted an element of closeness and physicality in the relationships I had with other men. Unfortunately, the men I met fell short of what I thought I wanted. I fell in love with David whom I met at college, but he just thought I was 'funny' when I said how I felt or made sexual advances towards him. (When I met him ten years later he said he might try a gay relationship because he was having so many problems with women. Unfortunately he had lost his charm for me by then!)

In my late teens and early twenties I continued to be attracted to both young women and young men, but the ones I fancied most did not fancy me and vice versa. Some good times were had though in coming to those conclusions.

The first person who responded to me in the way that felt right and with

whom I wanted both to have a sexual relationship and to live was Anne.

Neither Anne nor I had had much previous sexual experience, nor had we discussed our sexuality. I had no experience of living on my own except at school. We got married when I was twenty-three and Anne was twenty-one, and I expected to have a monogamous relationship. I hadn't considered any alternatives to monogamy. I had been shy and withdrawn, partly because of my belief that I was different from other people and that I would be rejected if they knew all about me. I thought perhaps I was just a late developer.

Once married, at last I began to develop some confidence. I had unwittingly acquired status. I was treated as an adult, though with no experience of how to be one. I had both won and lost my independence at the same time, but I could love and be loved, and have sex without fear of getting the wrong girl pregnant. It felt great; now I had a sexual relationship with a woman, my fantasies about men would fade into the past – or so I thought.

But I found that my attraction to men didn't disappear. I became very attracted to a man I worked with. He inspired me politically, as he identified very strongly as working class. We enjoyed working together for four or five years and shared the experiences of becoming fathers at the same time. We taught each other a lot. But there was no physical response from him and his feelings about me remained a well-kept secret. When I told him how I felt about him he told his wife, which wasn't a response I had envisaged. I was very depressed when he left the firm.

Because I had not found any straight men with whom I could establish a relationship of the depth I wanted, I made a conscious decision to find out more about gay men. Gay people were becoming more visible and I wanted to meet some of them. My need to talk to someone who would understand my feelings could not be suppressed much longer. Since I was thirteen, my only expression of this side of myself had been in secret infatuations.

I started to read the old *Gay News* in the early seventies when it was first published, and I answered some of the contact ads. Geoff, whom I met socially for several years, was the first person I got to know, and I learned a

lot from him about what it was like to be gay. He was involved with another man and we did not have sex until about two years after we met.

At the same time I met another man – Ray – whom I fell for immediately. But he rejected the idea of any emotional involvement with me because I was married. He was very reluctant to meet the family until much later when he became a great friend of us all. I was very keen for Anne to meet gay people, hoping she would find them less threatening face to face. When it eventually happened this was generally the case, and as she got to know gay men she acknowledged there were even some aspects of them that she found more attractive than in heterosexual men.

I wanted it all in the open so I did not have to feel guilty about it. For me, now, I think sexual attraction might lead to a brief sexual fling, friendship, (hopefully some intimate friendships, with or without sex) or a committed, possibly co-habiting, relationship. Even then I didn't feel sex for fun or sex between friends was either wrong, or inevitably threatening to a committed relationship, and I still don't as long as it is 'safer' sex. I felt I could allow my homosexual component to be in the open because I loved Anne very much. I enjoyed our life together, my commitment to our relationship was strong, and I was not looking for someone to replace her. I could read Gay News, invite gay friends home, and answer my childrens' questions honestly. Not only could I technically be bisexual, I could identify as gay and grow to be proud of it. In a way, I saw it as something I shared with her, in as much that women and gay men are both oppressed by heterosexual men.

What Anne felt, of course, was quite a different matter. I had successfully passed her my guilty secret and it became hers, something she couldn't share with anyone else, so badly did it reflect on her. Outwardly she seemed to accept the changes in me relatively easily and carried on with life much as before. I didn't tell her I had started having sex with other men, because I felt she would prefer to know as little about it as possible. It was only when I contracted NSU that she had to face all the implications that infidelity brings to a traditional marriage.

I regret that my personal growth and becoming whole was the catalyst for so much distress for somebody else and I'm grateful to Anne for sticking with me through that and for all the good times we had in spite of it. I am sorry I was not strong enough to leave her in no doubt that I cared for her very much, even when she was distancing herself from me because of my behaviour.

Once she realised I was actually having sex with men her first reaction was to get out of our marriage. It caused enormous difficulties, compounded by her feeling that she was being taken for granted, that she wasn't able to express her needs clearly enough and that what she wanted was not being respected.

My first long relationship with a man – Mark – was not a good time for Anne. She felt it was an intrusion into our marriage. She resented the phone calls. She and I didn't have sex for a whole year. At the root of the problem was the common feeling that she could have competed with another woman — but with a man? There was pressure on me from Mark too, although he maintained that he didn't want to break up my marriage. He was very closeted and though it seemed to suit him having a lover who wasn't too much in evidence, he wanted a greater commitment, particularly of time at weekends.

As well as ceasing to have a sexual relationship, Anne and I had stopped communicating, other than at a superficial level. Anne had become depressed, which was not a state I had seen her in before. I went to our GP to see what we could do about this situation. He referred us to the Tavistock Centre's Institute of Marital Studies where we had Psycho-Dynamic Therapy. This helped us to look at what was going on in our relationship, move forward and start talking again. After a while we began to want something that was selfmotivated, rather than therapy we had to pay for. I joined the Married Gays Group and enjoyed it immensely. It boosted my confidence. However I found that all of the married gay men I met seemed to have given up sexual relations with their wives, which was quite different from what I wanted. For two or three years after admitting my homosexual

feelings, I had been casting around for a valid identity, a peer group as it were, and a term to use to describe myself. My new-found confidence propelled me to an Anti-Sexist Men's conference in Bristol. This was to prove a milestone in my life. The conference was organised by Men Against Sexism – groups of men all over the country meeting regularly to try to find ways of changing their sexist, patriarchal and heterosexist attitudes and behaviour.

Their newsletter had carried an article about bisexuality and at the conference I met, for the first time, other bisexual men who were having relationships with women. At last, some people I could really identify with! I began to feel that the right way for me to identify was as gay politically and bisexual behaviourally. Having discussed bisexuality at the conference, a lot of men wanted to carry on discussing it. So a small 'self-help group' was set up and this met fairly regularly in London.

We produced an issue of the *Anti-sexist Men's Newsletter* with bisexuality as a theme. Then, as our group was closed to new members, we felt we should encourage an open mixed bisexual group. We advertised all through the summer of '81 and eventually 80 women and men turned up to the first meeting at the club 'Heaven' on September 1st. This was the foundation of the London Bisexual Group. In my enthusiasm for setting up LBG, I was very conscious that I wanted to show Anne that the feelings I felt for her were strong heterosexual ones; I hoped, too, to find in the group people who admitted to homosexual feelings, whether they acted on them or not, and saw them as a positive and good aspect of their lives.

Meanwhile Anne herself had gone to a conference in Nottingham organised by SIGMA (the support group for (generally heterosexual) partners of bisexuals, lesbians and gay men). She joined the SIGMA women's group which was trying to get away from the idea of 'isn't it awful to be married to a homosexual person'. Later she edited their newsletter, dealt with correspondence and set up the SIGMA telephone counselling service. She also undertook a counselling course, several other related training courses and a part-time job with the Gay Christian Movement. All of this, together

with her experience as the parent of children with cystic fibrosis, eventually helped her to a job in a magazine problem page department. She started to work there after we swapped roles.

After a painful split with Mark, I met Andrew through SIGMA. Anne hadn't got on with Mark but she was positively enthusiastic about Andrew.

Everyone seemed to like him and I loved being with him, though sexually the relationship was probably mutually disappointing. Anne was having a relationship with another man at the same time and the four of us occasionally went out together. This was the first time Anne had given me permission to be open and honest about my sexuality. I was happy about the gay side of me and consequently Anne's and my relationship improved again. This was at last the situation I had been hoping for – where both Anne and I were happy about what was happening.

Our separation came about when, several years later, Anne again fell in love with another man and wanted to live with him. There was always the recurring fear in her mind that ours wasn't a real relationship – because I was 'gay'. Yet I do not think the sexual aspect was the main cause of our breaking up. I often felt that Anne was disappointed with my performance sexually but there were other ways in which we found ourselves incompatible. I was trying hard to be anti-sexist – trying not to fall into the old patterns of male dominance, but she was not able to be assertive with me. I failed to understand this at the time, as she seemed so strong, confident and efficient in everything else she did. If she could have foreseen that the shy youth she married would become a pioneer, she probably would have run a mile, as she sees her aspirations as much more 'ordinary'.

I think Anne would agree that the area we came nearest to getting right was the bringing up of our daughters. I have met so many bisexual fathers who have not come out to their children, saying that they would do so when they are older and can cope with it. As Kate and Jo have cystic fibrosis, it was possible they could have died quite young,^[1] so that there may not have been a chance to be honest 'later on'. I was also conscious that they were going to have to cope with being different themselves, and I hoped my

acceptance of my own 'difference' would be a positive example for them. I believe the decision to be open with them was a good one. I have certainly derived a great deal of personal strength from it and I hope they may have too. I think that it is often less a matter of whether children can accept the situation and more whether the parents can.

One of the aims of the London Bisexual Group has been that sex education in schools should embrace bisexuality and homosexuality and that these should be properly and positively represented, as a matter of course, alongside the mechanics of sex and the study of human personality and behaviour in relationships. Small advances in this direction are being seriously threatened in the climate created by Thatcher and the tabloids, using AIDS as the excuse.

Fear and prejudice still surround homosexuality and I believe they will continue to do so until more people who are predominantly heterosexual can openly accept and value elements of homosexuality in themselves.

If children could be brought up and educated to consider bisexuality as a fact of life and a personal option, this would be a real contribution to the breaking down of the 'them' and 'us' attitudes on which the fear and prejudice thrive.

I'm happy being bisexual and much of the time I've felt I've hid what I wanted for both sides of my personality. I do not wish I hid been anything other than bisexual, nor do I wish I had not got married and had children. There have obviously been very painful times, but I've enjoyed making the effort to keep a long term relationship working and to be a good parent. I have also enjoyed the rich variety of people I've met and loved through my sexuality. It would certainly have been easier to do this in a society that could accept diversity as more desirable than conformity.

Now that my marriage has broken up, I do wonder what the future holds, especially in terms of relationships and sex with women. A major part of my life is still a shared commitment with my wife to the support of our

daughters. There's only so much time – I've tried a committed relationship with a woman, and I think I'd like to try one with a man. This is not because heterosexuality didn't work for me. I still retain the confidence that I could have a good sexual relationship with a woman. I know now that good sexual relationships with men are no easier. But as the oppression of gay people and homosexuality surges all around us in increasing waves, I feel I want to assert my gayness all the more. I know my love of other men has been good, not evil, and I know homosexuality itself can be a power for good. While the fence is there I want to stand on the gay side of it.

With hindsight I can see that it is highly unlikely that I shall ever meet any one person who could fulfil all of my emotional, intellectual and sexual needs. Now this seems obvious, but I had been encouraged to believe this was what a good relationship entailed.

The problem with falling for that fantasy of an ideal relationship is that one inevitably expects more of people than they can give. I have had several rewarding relationships of a 'limited' nature – limited in the sense that there were whole areas in our lives and attitudes to living which did not overlap at all. In this I have found a certain amount of balance between distinct and different needs, which has strengthened my self-image as a bisexual.

David died around 2018.

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Notes

- 1 At the time, the life expectancy of people with cystic fibrosis was very low and most died before aged 20. Fortunately, as of 2020, both Kate and Jo are still alive.

Friends

Friends

I DON'T FEEL TOTALLY ACCEPTED BY OTHER PEOPLE SO ALMOST all my close friends now are bisexual. With them I'm finding a new level of support and awareness. I just wish there were more bisexuals around.

Having been rather insular in earlier life, making friends is very central in my life and I'm always learning a lot.

Going through a lot of evolving personally I've found it painfully difficult at times to keep friendships flowing or experience another one fading away. I'm loyal, fearful of rejection, yet must follow my own path.

Can lovers be friends?

At 13, Gill and I 'explored' each other's bodies. At 18, when I told her I had lesbian feelings, she ran a mile. Some friend! Other than this, I've been very lucky — meeting beautiful people at perfect times. What would we do without friends to turn to when lovers have gone?

I love my friends, we love each other. A full friend for me is someone with whom there is mutual care, like, admiration, celebration, support, critique, curiosity, humour.

I think my bisexuality helps blur the distinctions between friends and lovers. Large amounts of my emotional energy goes out to friends, often much more than to my lovers.

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Clare

(**A** WAITING PERMISSION TO PUBLISH SOME VERSION OF
this)

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Fantasy

Fantasy

I CAN'T IMAGINE LIFE WITHOUT FANTASIES – AN ESSENTIAL outlet for pentup homosexual desires.

Fantasies can impair real relationships if they overtake reality but can be an escape to stave off depression.

I tried to fantasise about wimmin – I thought that's what a lesbian is supposed to do. But I couldn't. It was always men!

My fantasies are like the weather in Ireland – always changing, always a surprise and yet always familiar. My fantasies are about things I would really like to happen, generally about someone that I very much want to have sex with.

I used to have masochistic fantasies that I felt very guilty about but I think it's that part of your mind that is one of the last to change consciousness.

Sex is better in the head than it ever is in bed! My fantasies are either very basic (crude) or so detailed and bizarre that I can never remember them the next morning – I hate waking up.

Sexual frustration is alleviated by my ability to create an exciting, new and varied fantasy life.

A place to sort out unresolved conflicts, anger, shame and unfulfilled wishes.

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Brian MacGowran

'MAYBE "UNISEXUAL" WOULD BE A BETTER TERM THAN "BISEXUAL"'

Brian MacGowran, 33

LEAVING SCHOOL AT EIGHTEEN I KNEW THAT I WAS BISEXUAL, that I liked being bisexual, that I didn't know another self-acknowledged bisexual in the whole world and that things weren't going to be easy.

I came from a two-parent, two-sister, one-brother family and a set of single-sex, clergy-run schools in Dublin city. The family was nuclear in that there was plenty of fission between the parents and a lot of bonding between the children. We, the older children at least, knew that our parents loved us and that they were good people but should separate. I always felt my loyalties being divided between my very strong-minded and mutually antagonistic parents.

Home and school had many happy days and I got a lot out of them. One thing I missed out on was free expression of my love for a person regardless of their sex. My parents recognised only heterosexuality and they hindered

the development of even that in (heir children. At school the line was piety and purity with strong hints that we weren't just talking about the opposite sex. While my parents never interfered in my activities with other boys and, later, adolescents, my teachers were cute enough to go looking for improper actions, getting their kicks out of catching someone at it.

In childhood and adolescence I became fairly handy at breaking I he strictest rule in the teachers' book without getting caught. Some of my experiences with boys were happy, playful events, with no thought before or after. As I grew older I wanted more than just a)pod game: I wanted a lover-friend.

In my mid-teens I had two girlfriends. I liked them but wasn't mad about them. It was a burden to appear to be conforming: I felt I was on stage. In those days, my sisters were my favourite females: we got on well.

At seventeen, at a time when I felt overwhelmed with desire for male love, I met Reena, a quiet, smiling, sensuous, beautiful young woman. We were flung at each other by our passion. I felt we would be outlawed as soon as the adults realised. I did my best to pretend that nothing was happening when in fact the best thing ever was happening. The adults did end our union in a way, for our lovemaking was ruined by lack of contraception, illegal at the time.

In university, studying biology, I was delighted to be in an environment with both sexes: such a relief after school. Relations between women and men were fairly free and homophobia was mild. I began to come out as bisexual. My friends liked me 'for myself' but didn't want to know the full story. I retreated, felt cheated and put my energy into looking for love from one or another of the people around me. It was clear to me that some of the men were bisexual, but it was not clear to themselves. Nothing came of my efforts and I eventually lost interest.

In my second year I met a woman who fascinated me. Helen played all her games intellectually, repressing her sexuality quite a bit. With her incisive

mind she confronted the world fiercely, giving only a hint of her warmth and gentleness. As the months passed, we played fewer games, got to know each other and fell in love. We loved to be alone together but we had conflicting interests socially. After a year she became interested in another man, and so did I. We never discussed my bisexuality though Helen saw it clearly enough in the end.

For a long time I was mad about this man Paul, a kind, sensitive, mischievous, laughing being. We got as far as bed a few times but only shoulder to shoulder. He always assured me of his (asexual) love for me and skillfully avoided my attempts to get to the point. He did his best not to hurt me and to keep his position as a non-macho, affectionate heterosexual. I still wonder. We had great fun together in familiar and faraway places. On my own I was often miserable, verging on depression, suicidal. With time I came back to life.

After graduating I travelled a little in France, returning to Dublin to share a house with my sister, another woman and a man. This other woman, Maura, infected me with her laughter but her sadness floored me. For a long time I held on to the hope that we'd become lovers. During this time I drifted around Europe, enjoying the novelties but basically lost. I ended up teaching in a school in Belfast for a year, during which I learned an awful lot about life, and myself.

From warring Belfast I moved to thriving, lively Galway, to do postgraduate work. The town was new to me and life was exciting. I fitted in easily and enjoyed all the fun as well as the work. Mind you, I could find nobody who I recognised as gay or bisexual. Colleagues saw me as hedonistic and for months mock-playfully asked me if I had ever had a homosexual experience. I finally replied yes which ended mention of the subject. I had two intense shortlived relationships with women. Their bodies and minds captured me but their monogamous heterosexuality frightened me. The first woman wanted marriage; the second scorned contraception, leaving us to play, I felt, Russian roulette. There were also two incidents of surprise, unspoken, sex with men I met in holiday situations. I hadn't lost the desire

to come out but I felt less able than ever to do it.

From being very social and friendly I withdrew to a quiet life away from the town, living with my brother. This retreat was for the sake of my work as well as for my peace of mind. I imagined how my life would be completed by having a male lover. I didn't recognise then, but know now, that I also needed a bisexual relationship with a woman (by a bisexual relationship, I mean one in which my partner accommodates my bisexuality). I didn't recognise either that all my relationships with women had suffered from both my fear of pregnancy and my being taken as heterosexual and therefore monogamous.

Soon after I withdrew from the crowd, a lovely man called Kevin jumped out of it right into my arms. This event was spread over a fortnight but was nonetheless a leap. My brother left the house for his own reasons and Kevin moved in. It wasn't a piece of cake for us. Kevin had been seen as the nicest, handsomest, surest heterosexual walking the street and he'd never had sex with a man. Neither of us had ever known any gay-identified people and we could only guess at where such people would be found.

At first I was delighted that we should be seen together. This time, I thought, people would get the message that I felt good about what I was. Pretty soon Kevin began to quiver with the shock of finding himself in what was formerly a fantasy. Eventually the two of us were paranoid. Our friends never let us know whether or not they were aware of our relationship. Other people had their suspicions, and reacted with various degrees of homophobia and harassment.

At the same time as Kevin and I became lovers I met a friend of his, dark-haired, black-eyed, fine-featured, sharp-minded, tighthugging Cathy. She wanted a relationship with me, but was afraid of sex. As we got over this I found it impossible to tell her about my relationship with Kevin. I was very disappointed she wasn't able to see it for herself. At times the unnaturalness of this was an enormous strain. I contented myself with showing Cathy that I wasn't monogamous.

After six months Kevin and I had come through our paranoia and we felt we had achieved our main aim of not being beaten by the world's oppression. We'd talked to nobody, kept our distance and tried to show our contempt for heterosexism. Some of our friends were hurt by our keeping away from them. Cathy and I had developed a mock-heterosexual relationship with an escape clause: we were both free to go our own ways when the summer came. We all three talked a lot about travel and when summer did come Cathy went to America. That decided things for Kevin and I. We lost interest in our studies and in the life that went with them and we left for France.

We went to Paris where I lived for three years, Kevin for two. We lived together for short spells, we lost touch for others. We worked in heterosexual environments and all our close friends were heterosexual, though only a little heterosexist. To them the nature of our relationship was never an issue. We discovered the gay scene, and often went to bars and discos, together and individually. I had occasional encounters with heterosexual women and I grew steadily more unhappy with the lack of open bisexual relationships.

Kevin and I got a lot out of living abroad. We loved learning languages and we were excited by Paris and Europe generally. We met a lot of interesting people, some of whom are still great friends.

I came back from Paris to join Kevin and Liz, a lesbian friend of his, in a house they shared in Dublin. I was excited about living with them but Liz and I didn't get on domestically. After a year she left to live with her lover. Kevin and I spent almost two more years in the house. We put most of our energy into health and fitness, into our jobs (which interested us), into our families and into other such projects. We neglected our own relationship, which resulted in much strife, but we gave a lot of support to each other in other ways. There was some friction in our separate attempts to define our sexuality. I still hadn't got the better of the world's ignorance of bisexuality: I was somewhat oppressed by people's rigid classification of sexuality into hetero and homo. We left the house six months ago and I left Dublin for a new job in Galway. I wanted to get away from cities.

About a year ago I heard of the London Bisexual Group. I went to the Politics of Bisexuality Conferences in London and Edinburgh and have been building up bisexual contacts ever since. For the past few years all my heterosexual friends have known about my bisexuality. Cathy lives a few miles from me and we spend a lot of happy time together. Kevin is still in Dublin, though he's planning his next move. We see each other often.

Sometimes I speculate on the nature of sexuality and on the origin of my, or another's, sexuality. What I find more useful and more important, at least in the short term, is to confront people's rejection of love between people of the same sex and to challenge their view of the sexes as two species, at different evolutionary levels.

Recently a neat piece of surgery put an end to my fertility. I have always seen female contraception as another form of male control of women (in spite of the benefits it brings), so I decided to Like responsibility for my part in reproduction. I should have done it years ago when I first thought of it. It helps me to keep my distance from male-dominant society at the same time as it takes the threat and the fear out of sex with women. It's another stage in removing the cast which has been thrown about each of us. By working through the sexual process, nurturing the positive and getting the better of the negative, people will get to know each other better.

It's relatively easy for me now to write about my bisexuality. To get to this stage I have worked for years, alone and with others, through pain, doubt, fear, anger, division and confusion, coming eventually to the clear view of my sexuality and my personality, as whole and entire. Maybe 'unisexual' would be a better term than 'bisexual' in that my instinct is for a kind of sexuality, of personality, of mind and of body which I need and which I find in certain individuals of both sexes.

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Masturbation

Masturbation

MASTURBATION IS SO IMPORTANT TO ME. I HAVE GREAT difficulty having an orgasm when I'm having sex with someone – it's often so frustrating – masturbation is my release of that frustration.

It took me a long time to learn to love myself but part of that was making love with myself – masturbating without fantasy or merely seeing people as sex objects. I feel really miserable after coming now, if I've objectified.

Safe-sex codes are helping me to reclaim masturbation as great stuff, not just the bottom of the hierarchy of sexual practices.

I've been masturbating since I was a little kid. I didn't realise what I was doing. I just used to hang onto things, like the door and rub against them. It was a good way to relax. My parents never made me feel bad about it. Only our babysitters objected.

Through masturbation I learned more about myself and what I liked sexually, without having to worry about the other person. And it made me realise the potential for having sexual relationships with other women.

Masturbation was my first sexual experience. It is something I enjoy and it lets me use my imagination to full effect. Scenes I play in my head never quite work out so well in real life. But all fantasy is like that.

The orgasm from wanking is different to being with a partner. Comparison is difficult. With a partner there is hugging and intimacy which is at least as important as the climax.

I get the best orgasms from wanking, especially if someone else is helping. Intercourse is a real let-down for me when it comes to orgasm.

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Sarah

'I SURPRISED MYSELF THAT I COULD LOVE SOME MEN AGAIN'

Sarah, 20

IT WASN'T UNTIL I MET KEN, THE MAN I'M HAVING A relationship with now, that I realised I was bisexual. But it's only been in the past year that I've really come to terms with my bisexuality.

I spent most of my teenage years in relationships with men or other boys of my age – exploring sex, jealousy, love, hate, abuse, boy, satisfaction. It was always a challenge for me to ask someone out instead of the other way round – and it always used to work. By the time I was 17 I'd had plenty of experience and decided it was time to settle down! My boyfriend Steve and I decided to get engaged on my 18th birthday. However, the nearer the time came, the more vivid were my memories of the good old times when I wasn't yet a teenager and myself and my girlfriend Gill would go upstairs to bed to play at doctors and nurses or would strip to each other. It was exciting, especially as my Mum would say 'don't get up to anything' as we went upstairs.

Then I got to hear about Steve having a relationship with another wumun and decided it was time to end our relationship before he did. So what

would I say to him? Of course – tell him I think I'm a lesbian! He laughed, and so did I for a while, but having actually said it, the idea wouldn't go away. Could it be true? By the age of 17 I'd had so much sex with men, I felt really used.

So I stopped having relationships with men at all and became celibate. The idea of lesbianism began to fascinate me and eventually became a major issue in my life. Because I didn't enjoy the sex with men, by the time I was falling in love with wimmin I wanted very little to do with men. Men equalled 'abuse of my body' and I'd had enough. I could have quite easily become a separatist at that stage! However I never lost total contact with men and would go with them to gay clubs – I felt I was dependent on their transport, company or whatever. I didn't like it, though, and even asked straight wimmin friends to come along with me so I could dance with and be with wimmin.

How would I meet lots of lesbians? Someone suggested joining the army. So I started filling in papers and collating information on the subject. I had grown up in the Forces and to join the army was no big deal. Until one day I met a wumun and fell totally head over heels in love with her. She was a feminist and peace activist. I could understand the feminism, but not the peace. She sat me down and talked at length about the Peace Movement, the Falklands War and why she was an activist, In fact she wiped the floor with every argument I presented. So – there were lots of lesbians in the Peace Movement too! Well, I was still madly in love with her, so I decided it was time for another change. The army went out of the window. Here was Sarah the political feminist, and, did I dare say it lesbian!

The ball had started rolling – I went on demos, joined groups and tried desperately to meet lesbians of like mind. But it was so difficult actually telling a wumun if I was attracted to her. So I stuck to night clubs where there was a safer environment and a certain code of practice for meeting other lesbians. It was never totally satisfying, but it would do. At least I was having relationships with wimmin.

So, I had put myself in the lesbian world, taken on its culture and told myself that I wasn't allowed to like men. This was fine. Instead of feeling dirty and

horrible as I did after sex with men, I felt cleansed and refreshed after sex with wimmin, and it felt more exciting. Wimmin seemed to be more patient, appreciative, and more understanding.

I don't really know how bisexuality came back into it. In my mind it had gone from 'I don't like men, I am a lesbian' to 'I am a lesbian, I can't like men' and I had to undo all that. When I eventually slept with a man again after a two year gap, I saw it as two people coming together, not a man and a wumun.

I met Ken at Burtonwood Peace Camp. There was a man there, Andy, who I found attractive and I could feel him and Ken playing each other off for my affections. Through my loving of wimmin I had become so much stronger though, so that I was now in charge and I used Andy instead of the other way round. It was a complete role reversal and the control felt really good. After a while though I didn't really want to know either Andy or Ken, and I put them temporarily rut to the dustpile in my mind.

Soon however, the warmth began to develop between Ken and I until eventually there was almost constant touch contact. I suppose, as he was gay, he was less of a threat, and also being gay was a bond between us, so we spent a lot of time together. The electricity was growing all the time until the day we first had sex. I didn't fancy him, there was just a lot of feeling there. He was just a person I wanted to share some emotion with. But after the first time, I didn't want to know. I didn't want to become another man's slave and sex with men still equalled slavery to me, as that had been the situation in the past. I was still miles away from any feelings of bisexuality.

Although Ken and I became quite close we didn't have sex again and didn't see each other over the summer. We met up again at a reunion party and it was only when Ken slept with another wumun that, the following night, I joined him in bed again, actually prepared to be sexual. Part of that was jealousy, part of it was loneliness and feeling depressed. I was really surprised how good it was and with our being so close anyway, our sexual relationship developed from there. I still didn't see myself as bisexual, though.

We were very undercover about our relationship because I felt quite anti-

bisexual, and I didn't want to be seen as one. Two years before, I had been introduced to a bisexual woman, who I really fancied and instead of feeling that here was a woman I might become close to, I felt disgusted that I might be sharing her with a man, and she'd only be giving half her attention to me and still looking at men. In the end I just ignored her; my feelings went that deep.

Now of course, I don't feel this, because I've 'admitted' to myself that I'm bisexual. I only did this because I finally realised that wherever I am I do find both some men and some women attractive. It took a long time to come to terms with that, but I did!

I still worried that other lesbians held anti-bisexual feelings like the ones I'd had. Maybe it is this fear of rejection that delayed my coming out to myself as bisexual. I don't know. I went along to a Bisexual Conference in December 1984, without really knowing why, maybe because friends were talking about it. It was being there, seeing all these other men and women who loved both sexes, that made me realise that I WAS bisexual. So I came out to myself then.

Coming out to others has not been so easy. I'll tell straight people that I'm gay, then bisexual, because it still breaks down the stereotypes and goes against the norms, but I'm reluctant to tell gay people because of fear of rejection. With them I am still a closet bisexual, especially with lesbians. I find it easier to tell gay men, although their attitudes are often naive or bigoted. One gay man told me there was no such thing as bisexual! I may say that I've slept with Ken 'in the past' or that we 'experimented with sex' as we shared a flat, but I suppose I lie about our relationship, and about the other men I've slept with since meeting Ken. 'We are just good friends' is often the way out. I try to put the relationship down, make it out to be a surface thing quite a lot of the time.

With some people, fortunately, I can be honest. I can tell them how I was sure I was a lesbian, how I surprised myself that I could love some men again, and how deep my friendship with Ken really goes. I think the Bisexual Conferences have made me feel stronger and more positive. There are all these lovely people there, who are open to hugs from everyone and who can

break down all the labels. I'm glad to be bisexual because I am able to have the best of both worlds and love everybody if I wanted to. I'm not just limited to one half of the population.

Although within myself I feel positively bisexual, I still feel that any relationship I had with a lesbian now would be jeopardised by my bisexuality. I have started avoiding lesbians who I know will be hostile and I seek other bisexual women or open-minded lesbians. I do find it a struggle not always being able to be totally open, because honesty and openness are very important to me. I know that deceit, lies and untruth don't belong in my life — not feeling able to be honest about my bisexuality triggers off earthquakes in my stomach.

I don't want to have to 'suffer the consequences' for what I am. Why should I?! But I also don't want to lose contact with the lesbian culture where I have flourished and grown so much. Sometimes I wonder who's rejecting who?

One of the things I have learned through my struggle to come out as bisexual is the problems so many people have with coming out as gay. When I came out to friends as a lesbian it happened very easily. I was sure of myself and had very little trouble with other people. Coming out again has been so, so different, much harder and has really helped me to understand the struggle and traumas of others.

Surely one day there'll be no struggle and no traumas and no labels

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Sex

Sex

IN THE CURRENT MOVE TOWARDS SAFE SEX, MASTURBATION solo or with a lover offers an alternative to risky forms of sex.

It is interesting that a number of people I have listened to delude themselves into thinking that anyone who is lesbian, gay or bisexual is obsessed with sex. I have only to pick up a piece of phallic symbolism in a film or in an advertisement to be howled at by certain people for what they think is my obsession with sex.

My family ran around naked when it was hot. And Playboy and Cosmopolitan were always lying around. My brother and I weren't made to feel bad about our bodies. My parents were never very physical together but my mom was really cuddly.

My mom went without sex for ten years. But she was fairly permissive. She got me the pill. She used to say how lucky we are now, when we're not expected to be a virgin. 'Sex is important,' she said, 'and you should know whether you get on sexually with someone, before you get married or anything like that. It should be like fireworks!' I think she saw too many 40s movies.

I have a fear of telling my lesbian lovers I enjoy penetration – then when they say they like it, I kick myself.

I am definitely a polymorphous pervert (someone who can get erotic, sensual, erogenous stimulation from almost anything – food, cloth, etc. – or at least see the potentialities of it. It was coined by Freud in talking about babies) and I love every minute of it! I DON'T look for different things sexually from men and women and I feel very positive about not having penetration in having sex with men. I am into overturning the sexual/sensual dichotomy (the unclear area where sensuality stops and sexuality begins).

Sex may well be the most variable of experiences – it's lovely to think about and a monster when it goes wrong. I could go on about it forever.

Look, we need to enjoy safe sex, eroticise it. 'Safe' sounds sterile but it needn't be.

Maybe we need to question why we're having sex at all, to get in touch with our real feelings for each other. Love. Enjoy.

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Mike Blackmore

'COMING OUT IS NOT A SINGLE-SHOT EVENT – IT GOES ON ALL THE TIME'

Mike Blackmore, 43

B EING BROUGHT UP IN THE FIFTIES WAS NO HELP AT ALL when it came to sorting out my sexuality. Social and family pressures required an almost complete suppression of it – people spoke in hushed tones and apologised if it became necessary to mention the subject.

I found it strange that my male classmates seemed attractive, and was horrified to learn that the characteristic was considered 'queer'. To add to my confusion my interest in girls seemed about the same as the other boys, but I felt that I had more respect for girls than they did. They treated them as objects and made remarks based on sexual innuendo in their hearing. Several gay relationships came and went, but by the time I reached my mid twenties my overwhelming need was to be a parent, and for this reason, as well as the fact that it was expected of you, I eventually married.

For ten years we struggled to make the marriage work, but the storms and tempest grew beyond our control and we divorced, not on an issue

concerning sexual relationships, but simply because we had grown to dislike one another.

Two sons were born during our early years together, and for three years after the divorce I saw the boys about three or four times in each year – they had moved to Cornwall and I was still living in Bristol then.

During this time I had come to believe that I was gay – I told family and friends that I was gay and become involved in gay politics and activities. But the process of self-awareness – consciousness raising – went on from there. Acknowledging myself as gay was a big step, a tremendous step forward and brought me much happiness in having overcome what had seemed to be haunting shadows of self-suppression of all those years, but somehow it didn't quite fit. It was rather like taking a much loved overcoat from the wardrobe after „summer storage – it kept the wind from my bones but was somehow light across the shoulders.

On 28th April 1983, the Gay Community Organisation held its National Council in Hastings and I attended on behalf of Gaywest, the west country gay group. There I met Roger, who very soon became a central figure in my life and became a regular visitor to Bristol. He met the children in September of that year, by which time we had already planned that I would accept the offer of voluntary redundancy from my work, where I was unhappy anyway, and move to St. Leonards, near Hastings, to set up home with Roger.

The boys' mother had set up home with another man immediately after our divorce in what had been our home. They had another child and eventually married when his divorce was granted several years later.

The relationship between Roger and myself must have been more obvious than we thought, because on his return home the elder boy recounted all the details about 'Daddy's queer friends'. Unknown to us, he had taken it upon himself to search Roger's luggage and found his diary, and all this was recounted to a delighted mother and step-father – they had been looking

for some way of preventing access since the divorce. Since then I have not been able to see either child or speak to them except once, when the elder, encouraged by his mother, made an abusive telephone call to me, and reversed the charges! Their adoption by their mother and step father has taken place and there is nothing that I can do that will make it possible to see them again, at least until they are old enough to make their own choices.

I was with Roger for over eighteen months and during this time I felt a need to identify as bisexual. Coming out is not a singleshot event – it goes on all the time. Coming out to oneself is the first step, followed by coming out to others if you need to. Self awareness and consciousness-raising about ourselves and others need to continue if we are to develop as individuals.

Roger and I made a decision very early in our relationship that we would be non-monogamous (or non-monotonous as we prefer to call it). I find that I relate to people as themselves, as individuals, not specifically as 'sex objects' and I feel that this has heightened my awareness of other people's needs and feelings. It is not just a matter of sex or physical attraction – it is an emotional and physical need to share parts of myself with various other people and for a time be part of their life.

Despite the sadness which hangs over me because of the loss of my children, coming to terms with bisexuality did bring me a sense of peace and tranquillity that was missing before. I value this sense of self-understanding as a hard won prize. I have been greatly helped by being involved in setting up and running the Married Gays Support Group, which sets out to help all bisexuals whether married or not, as well as married gays and lesbians and their spouses, and divorced gays. I have also been helped by the friendship I have received from the London Bisexual Group and by playing a part in CHE (Campaign for Homosexual Equality) and the Gay Humanist Group. I see as a priority the need to evolve an open society without the divisive and damaging polarisations which exist at present.

In my own life I see the change continuing. I now feel that my journey through the 'minority parts of my nature' came about as an emotional

reaction to the shock and despair at the ending of my marriage. Bisexuality is in me all right but it would probably have gone unacknowledged if circumstances had been different. Although parted, Roger and I are still friends and, who knows, he might one day be best man at my second wedding. But I doubt if he would agree somehow!

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Celibacy

Celibacy

A PHENOMENON BROUGHT ABOUT BY LACK OF OPPORTUNITY
for same-sex relationships in a predominantly heterosexual world.

I remember periods in my life when I have chosen to be celibate since it opens possibilities for relating to people without viewing them as potential lovers so I'm finding my communications much warmer, much more spontaneous.

The thought of celibacy used to create deep fear in me, a deathfear. About half of my adult life has been celibate. I can't say that I was mostly happy when sexually active nor mostly miserable when celibate. Whenever I get an obsession with sex, or the lack of it, I get on with living my life to the full.

If it comes to having a choice of only sexual relations which are based on power and dominance, then I prefer to remain celibate.

Sometimes I get dramatic and say 'this is it'. But then someone comes along and changes my mind. Whenever I've been celibate, it's been for health reasons.

I didn't even know what celibacy meant till I arrived on the gay scene. I found out simply because people were so much more open about their sex

lives. I have never chosen to be celibate – I prefer to go along with the old Quaker saying, 'Way will show', i.e. let's just see what happens.

Some older experienced people can choose this. For many young people, not losing their virginity is highly, highly frustrating. (It was for me!)

Celibacy should be an accepted option for however long it makes sense.

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Zaidie

'I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT BISEXUALS ARE ANY
THREAT TO THE HOMOSEXUAL CAUSE'

Zaidie, 35

I THOUGHT I WAS HETEROSEXUAL UNTIL I WAS NEARLY 23 YEARS old. I had had an eccentric and moderately fulfilling relationship with a bloke for the previous four years. Then in 1971, after leaving college, I had joined a consciousness-raising group, part of the Women's Liberation Movement and had attended pickets and demos too.

Gradually I began to understand more about other women and myself; I stopped feeling that women's bodies were ugly, repulsive; I began to realise how and why women were oppressed. My boyfriend resented the group's confidentiality and the emotional changes I was undergoing which were no longer accessible to him. Our relationship began to falter, and during this time I developed an obsession with a woman I was working with, much to my surprise. I also moved into a radical feminist flat, where men could not visit (allegedly because it was the presence of men that necessitated housework which women, left to themselves, would never have any truck with).

My boyfriend, after one memorable row, sat outside on the wall and wept whilst I coolly observed him from my feminist eyrie; lost in the first glad euphoria of lesbian feelings, I was pitiless. In fact, the new attachment turned out to be a colossal illusion, although I spent a few desperate years in pursuit of my elusive friend. In my late 20s, I fell in love with a woman and the depth and intensity of my feelings triggered off many profound changes in my life. I developed a new perception of moral values and of the unconscious. Paradoxically, for the first time I also developed a wish for children.

In my early 20s I had unquestioningly accepted my bisexuality and naively expected to find a culture of bisexual women where I would be welcomed amongst the throng of marvellous women I expected to meet. Of course, this culture did not exist at all, at least not until quite recently. Where I came across lesbian culture in the Women's Liberation Movement I was at a loss to identify as a lesbian. This was not because I did not experience lesbian emotions. It had to do with my inability to relate to the 'lesbian view' of the world. I have struggled with my guilt about this for years. There was also much social and ideological pressure to hide one's bisexuality and to make a choice of sexual label – either lesbian or heterosexual. There were many feminist arguments against bisexuality, none of which I believed in, since I could not relate them to myself. Eventually I stumbled across a book by Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* (Pluto Press, 1977). I understood then the fear that had led lesbians and gay men to always reconstruct the definition of homosexuality to protect themselves. I understood the political imperatives of the past and to a degree I continue to respect them. But it is always with an immense sense of personal betrayal, since I do not believe that bisexuals are any threat to the homosexual cause, although we continue to be outcasts in the new lesbian and homosexual culture.

I also looked at my bisexuality in psychological terms (this was during the time when I was trying hard to become EITHER lesbian OR heterosexual)

and I found Lily Pincus' book *Death in the Family*. In it she maintains that bisexual feelings will always surface in a person who has been bereaved, but that they can, with support and counselling, be 'resolved'. My mother died in 1970 and I had been unable to mourn her enough; she had died cruelly from cancer which she had feared and resisted; my father instead had accepted his death some years previously with a kind of strength. I felt that Lily Pincus' theories might have some relevance to me and I entered psychotherapy in 1980, to try to come to terms with my mother's death and with a hidden agenda of 'clarifying' my sexuality. Then in 1984, I joined a bisexual feminist women's group and found the support and intellectual freedom I had been looking for. These days I have less guilt about my sexual 'deviance', and more faith in myself.

I feel sad that bisexual people are invisible and invalidated in our society when they have so much to offer. I feel that in a new society there must be room made for bisexual people. I don't think that everyone should be, or is, bisexual, but I think that it is potentially very creative, both emotionally and psychologically.

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Sharon

AIDS IS CHANGING THE SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR OF A
GENERATION AND FEEL AS IF I AM A VISITOR
FROM ANOTHER PLANET

Sharon, 36

MANY YEARS AGO, AT A WOMEN'S LIBERATION CONFERENCE, I was in a workshop discussing celibacy, when an angry woman stood up and shouted, 'You're all heterosexual celibates and I am a lesbian celibate,' before stomping out in disgust. At the time, I was inclined to dismiss her outburst as a joke – as far as I was concerned, I was celibate because I wasn't doing it with anybody, nor hadn't before, even though I had been growing up in the 60s, when everybody knew that everybody was doing it all the time.

It was some years before I realised that most celibate women (I haven't talked to men about it) imagine that if they were having sex it would be with a particular sort of person (or people). I didn't allow myself to have any fantasies at all, and I even persuaded myself that sex didn't interest me. This is not the same as saying I didn't want to have a relationship – at times I got desperate about not having one, but I had a lot of trouble connecting it up

with sex.

There are many reasons for this, to do with my family background, my religious upbringing, and my own particular resistance to being born female in a sexist society. However, it is only very recently, through talking to other bisexuals, that I have realised that part of not having a relationship must be to do with the lack of space to express my own true feelings. Just now I almost wrote 'my confusions', but in my deepest heart, I don't believe that the confusion lies in me. It is hard to hang on to this truth when the pressures are tremendous to conform to one 'normal' mode of behaviour or the other.

Despite the almost crushing weight of my family's and society's requirements, the one thing I have never felt is heterosexual. Apart from that, I go in cycles. These days they are more erratic, but they used to correspond with the seasons: three months each of being certain I was truly celibate, truly bisexual, truly lesbian, followed by a quarter of not thinking about it at all before the whole thing started again. It would revolve around my brain, making me unhappy, making me wonder how someone who was so decisive in other areas of her life could be so weak-willed in this one.

As a militant feminist I felt that my failure to come out as a lesbian was an awful betrayal of my sisters, and that if I could only pull my moral socks up, I would be able to withstand the pressures of my family and community and do the decent thing by the Women's Liberation Movement. This, I was assured, would provide me with all the new family and community I needed. It was an attractive proposition, especially as I fancied many more women than men, but somehow, I couldn't make the necessary adjustment. Even as I write this, I feel guilty and lacking in moral fibre, although I know that is inconsistent with the rest of my life.

Only last week, I sat around a table with the group of lesbians and listened to them all saying they knew they were dykes from the age of 13 or 14, even if they didn't act on it for many years. I couldn't feel comfortable with that description, because at that age I just felt different, lost. Sure, I had fantasies

about my girlfriends, found most boys unendurably boring (still do!), but I was also always as interested in the concept of maleness as in that of femaleness. The first person I fell in love with at the age of 10 was a boy a year older. And, as I say, I was extremely disconnected from any real idea of sex, so my interest in people was primarily in their minds and, to a lesser extent, though connected, in their status.

Throughout my twenties, I had four or five one-night stands with women, which I enjoyed, but I never seemed able to achieve anything more permanent. I did try once, with a lovely woman who had been a friend, but I didn't fancy her and I felt ashamed of having deluded her. I fell hopelessly, passionately, weak-at-the-knees-and couldn't-sleep in love with two people over those years – one man and one woman – and I never made it into bed with either. There were excellent practical excuses in both cases, but mostly it boiled down to my own terror – partly a dread fear of catching something (long before the world had heard of AIDS), partly anxiety about my parents, and partly, I now think, an unconscious fear of committing myself to one gender at the risk of cutting myself off from the other.

When I eventually did get involved in a relationship, it was with a man. Although the underlying reasons were extremely complicated, the immediate practical ones were that we were a long way from home, I didn't think that we knew anybody in common or that it would last beyond three days (wrong on both counts!) and – most importantly – he asked me. As our relationship developed, I felt a huge surge of anger as I realised that I really enjoyed sex. All those years of being conned even now I find it hard to articulate my sense of outrage at that discovery. I would probably have ended our relationship sooner if I had not been reluctant to give up this pleasure so recently discovered. For I was under few illusions that finding another relationship would be any easier now that I had finally embarked on that one.

Even while it continued I was in a state of semi-celibacy, as my lover and I lived many miles apart and didn't see each other very often. I never excluded the possibility of other relationships closer to home, but met very

few people I fancied. Rarely did I come across men, and which self-respecting lesbian is going to get involved with a woman who's involved with a man – even a man who was as effeminate and semi-detached as mine?

It is now nearly two years since that relationship ended. In these two years I have fallen madly in love with two women who both live thousands of miles away. I've also spent five months totally convinced that this time I had got it right and I really was a lesbian and I would never be interested in men again. The spell was broken by a man with whom I had spent one disastrous night eight years before. We were sitting in a pub when I decided I fancied him something rotten. Since then, I have been obsessed with four men, one of them gay – mainly on the basis of their potential as fathers of the child I think I would like to have. I have been simultaneously obsessed with a woman whose main attraction is how much she reminds me of one of the women I fell in love with. I have also spent a couple of months thinking I would go completely off my head if I didn't have sex with somebody soon. Throughout these two years, I have slept with nobody.

I listen to discussions about how AIDS is changing the sexual behaviour of a generation and feel as if I am a visitor from another planet. I try not to get annoyed with people who refer to celibacy as if it were a fortnight in Majorca. Obviously my lack of a sex life is due to many more things than simply bisexual feelings. But the more I think about it, the more it seems that it might, after all, be a significant factor.

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Long-term relationships

Long-term Relationships

N O SEXUAL ONES, BUT LOTS OF NON-SEXUAL ONES WITH MEN and women.

I love being close to people and that means KNOWING them. More often than not for me this takes a long time and a long relationship to achieve it.

Six months sharing everything with someone has given me more for life than many people seem to get out of twenty years of marriage. Nearly all the lovers I've had are now among nay friends and it looks like we're going to keep it that way. I don't think of how long a relationship is going to last, but rather of how far it's going to go.

I'm in a long-term relationship now, and find it very worrying that this choice can be used to attempt to define my sexuality – because I'm living with a man, I'm seen as heterosexual.

I have to place some limits on relationships otherwise I feel threatened by the other person.

A safe place to hide in, conditioned essentially out of a predominantly monogamous culture.

I feel it very hard not to fall into patterns in long-terns relationship, also the way you are defined by people around you – I would NEVER consider marriage.

A secure emotional backdrop and a springboard to bounce into complimentary relationships occasionally.

Several long-term relationships and specially the trust that grew, released me from what felt like a pit.

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Pink Dandelion

'I SUPPOSE I SAW MYSELF AS A GAY BISEXUAL'

Pink Dandelion, 22

I SEE MY STORY AS PRIMARILY ONE OF GUILT. THIS FEELING has in turn affected my whole life and I suppose my bisexuality is the major undercurrent determining where I live, with whom I live and how I live.

I don't think I ever doubted my capacity to love wimmin. I used to have fantasies about both sexes, but the opposite sex was threateningly mysterious and unobtainable. I wasn't a 'real man' and hated the role-playing involved in courting. All my infatuations, then, were with men. I think I also saw love between two men as superior because it was love between equals, each independent, each assertive. Whilst at school I don't remember being attracted by a wumun's mind. In the straight world I was living in, it seemed I was only infatuated with people of the wrong sex.

Nevertheless my bisexuality was undoubtedly with me all the time. It's very difficult to plot. At each stage of my life, I remember feeling things for wimmin and yet, especially after school, my whole world was becoming

more and more orientated towards homosexuality. At college in the first term, I started sleeping with men and came out, first to the wumun next door, who I 'fancied', then to 'the world'.

Having sex with men was very important. It rid me of my inferiority complex and later, when my first sexual contact with a wumun was disastrous, it didn't really seem to matter.

I came out as gay (i.e. homosexual), but to my friends and family I was quite open about my bisexuality. With the exception of my mother, I didn't see it or use it as a cop-out statement, just a position of honesty.

My bisexuality was generally very undercover though and I became more and more politicised into a gay culture and gay politics. There were lots and lots of men and it was still very rare for me to meet a wumun I was attracted to. All seemed hung up on make-up and stereotype role-playing.

Of course this changed when I met lesbians within the Lesbian and Gay Movement. So, after three infatuations with men-friends at school, I became infatuated with a lesbian. Instead of saying all my loves were of the wrong sex, I now said 'all were of the wrong sexuality'. Even in infatuation though, I didn't see myself having sex with wimmin except in my mind. So I suppose my bisexuality was defined on thinking things, emotional and sexual, for both sexes, but not actual sexual activity.

I gave up college after a year but was a union officer and was still very much into the student world and student politics. It was at this time that I met a bisexual lesbian, i.e. someone whose culture and identity was lesbian, but who did feel something for some men. I suppose I saw myself as a gay bisexual. The relationship with Robyn was to prove extremely significant in the short term, and indeed up to two years after our three month spell together.

I feel it was the first caring relationship I had: she was the first person who had shown me any love. Through her I was able to feel strong enough to

hug people, to stick by my politics and principles, to start becoming a more whole person, and start looking at my maleness and sexism. Then it all ended.

At the start we had had the ideal of loving people, the sex of the person didn't matter. Our relationship was based on independence, honesty, care, no assumptions (except that we wouldn't refuse each other a hug) and we were very open about it. As a result I had a lot of hassle from some gay men. I argued that you could be gay AND bisexual. I was more worried about Robyn in that there seemed to be more of a lesbian community and I didn't want her to be excluded from it. She felt I had more to lose.

Maybe I did. She stayed within the lesbian community, I felt excluded by many of the men I had been close to, just at the time I needed their support. I wondered why I was being a threat. I'd never seen myself as heterosexual or behaving in a heterosexual way. But I didn't know anyone in my position. While it hadn't been any trouble being gay, I wondered if I was the only bisexual in my shoes.

Being in 'my shoes' involved not only being gay-identified but also, having been made so aware of sexism and male domination, of pledging not to sleep with wimmin, or as my confidence increased, 'move in' on wimmin, as I had done in the past with men. (Seeing a man I liked, I would target him and would work hard for him to get to know me well and to become a good friend and hopefully a lover).

Eventually I sold out. I felt really miserable and guilty for doing so. Another lesbian, Sue, who I had felt for even before I had met Robyn, indicated a mutual feeling and pitifully, I took up the chance of a relationship and went round to see her. In fact a relationship didn't happen but having sold out once, the gates were open and a couple of months later there were as many wimmin as men in my non-monogamous world.

I felt guilty that I was oppressing wimmin – hindering them along their path of liberation. In my mind I could see Robyn disapproving. The

wimmin I slept with were assertive and independent. I felt they were doing what they wanted to, therefore I couldn't be totally blamed. If they were lesbian as well (usually) then my guilt was reduced a second time cos I knew they were aware of the options. But I still didn't trust myself not to oppress wimmin at all and continually made efforts to exclude wimmin from my bed-life. The only problem was that I was feeling more and more for more and more wimmin. There were great battles going on in my head – my love of wimmin versus Robyn's separatism, my recognition of my sexism, of not wanting to sell out, not wanting to be seen to sell out.

I was also, within the Lesbian and Gay Movement, very closeted about my bisexuality. I didn't want to be seen as halfheterosexual, as a threat to lesbians, as reinforcing the system that oppresses us all as lesbians and gays. In London bisexuals were called 'bicycles' and teased. When I wanted to move south, I knew I wouldn't be able to take this abuse constantly so I came to Brighton instead. I was still frightened of rejection from the only community I felt a part of, the lesbian and gay one. Yet more and more I came to terms internally with my own bisexuality and although family and friends wished I would make up my mind one way or the other, I knew that was unlikely to happen.

Two groups then helped me a great deal. One was the Quakers, and in particular FHF, their lesbian and gay group, which offered me the support of lesbian and gay pacifists (something else I had been since school). The second was the setting up of the Radical Lesbian and Gay Identified Bisexual Network, which was ME. Also there were ten other wimmin and men. At last I had found people to relate to. We were very much together as people, working within the Lesbian and Gay Movement, who had received hassle from our lesbian and gay sisters and brothers and who wanted to combat their bigotry, yet stay within the Movement.

I suppose this was my position for some time really, although I wondered whether I was trying to cop-out of my bisexuality hassle by saying, 'Oh, but I'm gay-identified,' and by hiding within the Movement. It seemed a more radical move to try and form a Bisexual Movement, a bisexual community,

to be separate. I think that needs a greater degree of strength and awareness because of the way society is at the moment, categorising, labelling, assuming, indoctrinating.

My guilt put me in a quandary. I still didn't feel OK about relationships with wimmin. I let them take charge, would be scared to show affection in the street, even hold a wumun s hand. Yet I believed so strongly in the bisexual ideal of finding the potential of being able to love everyone, and hopefully realising that as well. This fitted in with my Quakerism and my Anarchism and the world I wanted to move towards and work towards politically: one where the full potential of bisexuality was realised.

I saw that it was simply a question of alternatives. First I could try and rid myself of two layers of guilt. One was for my copping out as a bisexual, all too often being closeted about my true feelings and hiding in the Lesbian and Gay Movement; the second was the guilt I felt about sleeping with wimmin – maybe using them and draining them emotionally (and more, breaking my earlier pledge). Most of this guilt and fear came from the present set-up of society. Lesbians and gays are oppressed by the system which says heterosexuality is the norm. Wimmin are oppressed by men – used, raped, beaten – and men attempt to control their sexuality and their lives.

The second alternative was to help move society towards a state of equality, of sharing, of peace and freedom where we could take control of our own lives and rid ourselves of the restrictive labels foisted on us by others. I guessed that maybe I should be trying for both.

In fact my guilt was to last for two years and ended only when I had moved out of the midst of the Lesbian and Gay Movement, which had so often censored the other side to my sexuality. Guilt had split me into two – mental ideal and bodily want. It hampered my movement towards wholeness and urged me to destroy relationships with wimmin, which I did. I knew what I felt bad about but was frightened just to let go and follow 'be yourself' ideals, put forward by contemporaries.

Then it was suggested to me that guilt could be creative, and perhaps temporary; that we feel guilt when we stray from our true intention, so in a guilty state we can discover our true intention, and act on it, and be content in our conviction. I looked at my guilt and in fact saw that it was my actions, not my ideas, which were closer to my true intention. I didn't in fact want to love wimmin as well as men. I also saw that my original ideals had been based on trying to impress ONE wumun, Robyn, – i.e. I had been saying, 'I must not get close to wimmin,' in the hope I could get close to one! – not on trying to live out my gut ideology.

So now I say I am guilt-free. I have discovered my true intentions, feel good about that, don't dislike part of me anymore, listen to body as well as mind, can give more love, and see men and wimmin as equal which is much healthier. It's like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders. Now I am outwardly proud of my bisexuality!

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Marriage

Marriage

I N A GOOD RELATIONSHIP, BEING MARRIED OR NOT shouldn't make any difference. But being married can be useful. It's easier to explain about children. It'll also make life easier for my children. But maybe people's attitudes are changing.

What's a piece of paper and a few extra benefits when two people are in love? Marriage, to me, conjures up disaster, access to ownership, possessiveness, jealousy and unwanted frustrations.

Classically and romantically (or should that be commercially?), a beautiful thought, like flower power. However, my own illegal, 'immoral taboo', 'perverted', 'disgusting', filthy' life has come closer to the utopian ideal of wedded bliss than most of the marriages I've seen. There's more love, more understanding, in many a men's toilet, than in half the marriage beds.

I've been married once – for security and to please – I don't regret it and maybe it made it easier for my wife to have our son – but I can never imagine doing it again.

It appears that very few bisexual men get divorced because of an unsuccessful marriage. Generally they make good, responsible caring fathers. That they cannot be faithful to their wives is due to the fact that without male sexual companionship, a very important part of their nature remains frustrated and unfulfilled.

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Mandy Moore

'GOOD THINGS ABOUT MY LIFE ARE HAVING A MARRIAGE TO TURN TO WHEN A GAY RELATIONSHIP FALLS APART'

Mandy Moore, 26

MANDY MOORE WAS BORN IN MAIDSTONE, BROUGHT UP on the Romney Marshes and now lives in Ore village, near Hastings. She is married and has children.

* * * * *

I think you are born with your sexuality rather than coming by it. I became aware of it in my teens and looked it straight in the eye at eighteen. After I was married I really faced up to it, when I had a crush on a friend who I had thought was bisexual but who wasn't.

There have been some bad experiences because heterosexuals think that you are 'queer', and gays think you are not! Many bisexuals will not openly acknowledge their sexuality- they say 'I'm gay' when they are with

someone of the same sex, and 'I'm straight' when they are with someone of the opposite sex.

I find that when I start a new relationship with a girl and explain that I am bisexual, at first they are quite happy – they say 'OK, no problem'. But later on they don't like it. They turn against you. They have the same attitudes to racially mixed marriages, which ours is.

Good things about my life are having a marriage to turn to when a gay relationship falls apart, and having someone to turn to who is understanding and sympathetic and not connected with the gay community. It keeps you together. I like being different to other people – I am quite proud now, but didn't used to be.

It's better if you can keep a gay relationship purely sexual and without emotion: that's fine in theory but in practice it never ends up like that. I always get too emotional, then it explodes and dies – better if you can avoid the emotion. One gets involved, the other doesn't, then somebody gets hurt. I ALWAYS get involved; then sex doesn't matter. I just want to be with them. The sexual aspects are important in the beginning because that's what you want. Yet you have to spend time together as a preliminary when all you want to do is go home and go to bed together.

I was once in a gay pub and saw a guy I knew pick up another guy. I asked him how he managed to do it so quick. He told me that he just went up to the other chap and said 'Do you want to go to bed?' The chap said, 'Yeah, great!' I asked the girl I was with what she would have said if I had said that to her. She said that she would probably have punched me in the mouth!

I have to be fair to my husband. I try not to say that I am going out for half an hour, then stay out all night! I have to be guarded because of the children. I want them to establish their own sexuality and not be influenced by me. If someone comes around when the children are there,

it is difficult. You cannot be yourself, hold hands or anything. I wouldn't even give anyone a kiss on the cheek, although I have seen heterosexual friends do that. I would walk down the street holding hands if the children are not about. That doesn't bother me. Same in the pubs – you soon find out where you are welcome – my money is as good as anybody else's.

It can be difficult because I don't like to go out two nights running – maybe I am out half the week but only on alternate days. It makes a gay relationship very difficult. Say there is a party on Friday, disco Saturday and something else on Sunday – it means that I have to miss at least one thing, and the other person will either miss it as well, or resent it, or will go and I will be wondering what they are up to. Either they will meet someone who is more available, or I will think they have met someone and arguments start, and the relationship breaks up that way.

My husband is great about everything, but he likes to know what is happening. He likes to be introduced to my gay friends and often likes them.

My mother thinks that I should be one thing or the other. Being married means that you can mix with your gay friends but not touch. To have a gay affair when you are married is like adultery. Mum thinks that André, my husband, is such a hero, putting up with my gay friends – she doesn't understand that he enjoys their company!

My father just doesn't accept it at all. He doesn't understand and will not talk about it.

One of my sisters is happy about everything and likes to go to gay discos, and enjoys the company of my gay friends, but the other just says, 'it's OK,' then makes catty remarks behind my back.

One set of grandparents doesn't need to know – I hardly ever see them

anyway. I think that the other set know because my grandfather has stopped saying, 'They should be shot at dawn,' and quickly changes the subject if it ever comes up.

Friends that I knew when I pretended to be 'straight' have all gone now. Some just didn't want to know, others just moved away. People who have met me as I really am, or knew early on, accept me much more readily.

I find that I get invited to parties as the almost mandatory 'gay friend', and told that it would be 'cool' and 'trendy' if I could bring a girl friend. I don't mind because they are not pretending about it.

At my workplace, only my sister knows, but where I worked before people were great. I had my first big affair while I was there, and when it broke up, they were very supportive. I still know some of them socially. They used to make pleasant jokes, and take telephone messages from girlfriends. It all depends on what you do for a living. In the jobs I had there were many gay people and it was accepted, but in other jobs it's not so easy.

All in all, I live virtually the way I want to, but not all of the time.

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Families

Families

MY BROTHER'S A SKINHEAD AND GOES ROUND BEATING UP 'poofs' – not very useful when his 'big sis' is a dyke!

I'm basically out to all my family but we don't get on well at all. This is more to do with different approaches to life – which of course my bisexuality is part of – than just the fact of my bisexuality.

My family is all the people I am close to and committed to – I have a fine supportive family spread all over the place – I'd like to find some to live with and include children. I feel my parents are part of my 'extended family' as I have good, open relationships with both of them – I feel more and more that my brother is not part of the family as we have nothing in common.

My parents practise what they preach: great family love, loyalty and support, but all this is conditional on not telling them anything they cannot handle, for instance about my being bisexual.

Andy

'Bisexuality the one place i can box myself for society, and leave off the lid'

Andy, 27

I USED TO FEEL THAT I WAS A PRETTY UNTYPICAL BISEXUAL when listening to the bad experiences some people had been put through by heterosexuals and by lesbians and gay men. As of Sunday 9th June 1985, and the 2nd Extraordinary General Meeting of the London Lesbian and Gay Centre, i have been in the firing line of a lot of angry lesbians and gay men. I have had glares, snide remarks, and even open hostility from people there, mainly women. It seems that by standing, up as a bisexual man, by saying that i belong to the centre, by simply existing as i am, i have alienated some, possibly many, women from the place. This was not my intention, and it hurts very deeply that lesbians who knew me to be a bisexual man before the 9th, and accepted me, now reject me, even treat me quite hostilely, or are just pure and simply embarrassed to know me. I used to feel guilty because i was a man, mainly because of the well-aired myth that all men are the same. I now feel an enormous amount of resentment to those who accept this myth, those who box me as a man oppressor. I do not belong to the world of men; i rejected the world of 'real' men long ago, negated my manhood, and men in general rejected me.

At the age of 16 i was raped by a man i trusted. Rape is often given in feminist circles as a typical example of women's oppression, but rarely is it acknowledged that men go through this experience too. So little thought is given to the rape of boys that unless the police and the establishment mental health workers become involved, there is nowhere to turn. Especially when one is out, and one realises that if the police become involved the man would go to jail, not for rape, but for having sex with a minor.

I couldn't reconcile this, so i said nothing to anyone. The first time i spoke about it was at 21, to a man i was seeing at the time. I still haven't dealt with it. As a man i couldn't ring a rape helpline and ask for help. I am, however, in the process of joining a gay men's consciousness-raising group, so who knows, perhaps the time has come.

About a year and a half after my rape i met the man of my dreams. Our relationship lasted for three years, and in honesty ended like a nightmare. Looking back on it now i can see why. At 18 i was extremely naive. I allowed myself to play the role of wife, to become an ornament, to become a mere extension. I lost myself completely. When our relationship ended i had one friend, the only one of my friends i had kept contact with. My lover didn't like even this one, but somehow we remained friends, even though in three years we only saw each other three times, secretly. When i was given back my independence, i had no idea what to do with it. I didn't even know what i enjoyed doing, and it took longer than a couple of years for me to get a hold on my life and stop doing things we used to do habitually, even though i didn't enjoy them.

It seems it is easier for people to box all classifications separately and distinctly. Therefore in a lot of feminist literature there are references to 'all men', but men are not all the same.

A few months after i had split with this lover i met a woman who found me attractive. The fact that i found her attractive too scared me out of my wits, so i ran away from her, and my bisexuality, telling myself it was because i

was on the rebound. I wasn't, and a few months later there came another situation which again i ran from. I didn't want to be bisexual; i d listened to feminists and knew from experience around me that it was impossible for a man and a woman to have an equal relationship. I was still naive enough to believe equality was possible in same sex relationships. So i carried on seeing men, but i knew it wasn't the answer.

It is very difficult to escape one's conditioning, but i am changing. I'm learning to accept people on their terms, to challenge oppressive behaviour in myself and others, especially men. It seems to me that the Radical Men's Movement, what there is of it, is beginning to grow up. Some men are even taking on the responsibility of male problems, trying to help other men to live in a new way and share experiences. We've got a long way to go, but then we are a very new movement compared with the Feminist Movement.

It has taken me five years to come to terms with my bisexuality, to get to the stage where i think i am capable of having a relationship with certain women. I do not search for sex with women, but if within a relationship i have with a woman, she makes the first move, towards sex then it becomes a possibility. I do not fuck women or men, because i don't want that much inequality in a relationship i'm having with someone. I feel that men have been brought up to do what we want sexually, but women have been socialised into giving. One way is to allow a man to penetrate her. So when that happens is it equal or is she doing something that is seen as giving herself to the man as opposed to sharing a sexual experience? This creates an imbalance in the relationship because neither of them really knows what is going on. They are seeing it from different angles. I have once had intercourse because the woman i was with was in control of the sex, was on top and decided that that was what she wanted it, do, not because of her socialisation, but because she enjoyed being in control of that particular sex act.

Having spoken to friends about my bisexuality there seems to be one very contentious issue: I see myself as gay and bisexual, they say this cannot be.

However, my lifestyle having developed over the last 10 years as an 'out' gay man, i am not going into the closet. I am still gay. If i have relationships with women they will be nearer to gay relationships with women than heterosexual ones.

Many gay men, and for all i know lesbians, have the occasional sexual relationships with a member of the opposite sex. I've watched gay men use their homosexuality to keep women they've had sex with at arm's length. I may never have many female lovers, but i am not going to negate the contribution they make to me as a person, or pretend they mean nothing to me. I can have sex with a man and never see him again, but i can't do this with a woman, because before we make love we have already become friends.

One of the things i was asked to do when writing this was to define my bisexuality. All i can say is that i see it as a non-label, as the one place i can box myself for society, and leave off the lid. I don't have any defined role, and can play a different one each day.

On a very positive level, coming out as bisexual has enabled me to talk about my feelings with other bisexuals, with heterosexuals, and with lesbians and gay men. Not all the response to me has been negative, and i have realised where my real friends are. I'm also making new friends. I can relax in the knowledge that i'm being true to myself, and honest with others. I attend the London Bisexual Group meetings and have found great amounts of support there. I think overall the quality of my life has actually improved, especially on a very personal level because i am not trying to suppress my feelings.

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Children

Children

I COULD NEVER MAKE UP MY MIND – THEN IT WAS TOO LATE.

I'm so worried about what I might be doing to a young person in the way Fin inter-relating to them, i.e. I'm socialising them wrong, or putting propaganda forward, or not loving them enough, that I stay away. I see myself as a failure even before I've started.

The only person's children I really wanted was female – and you can't have a baby that way.

It's important to raise children to see all the alternatives, different lifestyles from marriage and family, so they can make their own choice.

I've been wanting a child for years but haven't been in a situation where I've felt it would be right – I couldn't live in a 'nuclear family' so it would have to be living communally or on my own with a network of support – I would really be into taking equal responsibility for a number of children with a number of adults, but I haven't found anyone into it yet. Fin still looking.

I don't hate children. I think I'm scared of them, like wimmin. I don't know

how to approach them, how to open myself up properly. I think they sense this.

People are so afraid of gays influencing 'their' children – what about heterosexual influence?! Pah!

Unspoilt children are as good company as you'll get. I don't see children at all as a subspecies. I take them entirely as I take adults. The world is no more or less theirs. If you take a child around a town for a day, you'll see how severely children are discriminated against; there are barely any facilities for them, in a world which 'cherishes' them.

I want to have a child within the next year. So does my male lover. It's going to be really hard to stop ourselves being related to as 'just another heterosexual nuclear family'. I need the support of the bisexual community to avoid this trap – luckily it seems forthcoming!

I had a vasectomy because I was scared of the power I might dream up if I was a biological father, like my mum had over me.

It's been such a gift fathering a child – though I don't feel I want or need another. We've been together a lot, right through his birth and ever since – 5 1/2 years. I've always enjoyed children – play, creativity, energy – and at one time with my work too. And I've learnt so much about myself – my limits, priorities, taking care of myself – as much from times feeling overwhelmed in my son's early years as from being with his present moment aliveness. I feel so much clearer and stronger now – being a father has helped me complete and heal much of my childhood and non-relationship with my own father.

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Anna

'I LED A DOUBLE EXISTENCE'

Anna, 41

BISEXUALITY FOR ME HAS NOT, ON THE WHOLE, BEEN A rewarding and positive experience. The inner and outer conflicts and isolation have been painful and frustrating. However, I am sure that these would lessen if I could allow myself to take the plunge and be honest about coming out.

I am not one for labels. People are individuals and should not be categorised according to their sexual preferences, which are solely their own affairs. I would prefer to consider my own sexuality as undefined; operating on several levels and conflicting in nature, while evolving with my psychological development. My dividing line between what's masculine and what's feminine has never been clear – I am usually drawn to boyish women and sensitive 'pretty' men. Sometimes I am so confused that I am unsure whether I am attracted to just men, just women, both or neither.

Bisexuality conjures up this concept of 'having a great time' with both sexes either simultaneously, consecutively or alternatively with few exclusive

committed, monogamous relationships. Part of me would like to act out these impulses, while part is jealous of people with these characteristics. Another part says that I can only handle one intimate sexual relationship at a time, whether it be with a man or a woman.

Nevertheless I am capable of being attracted to a number of people at once (now predominantly women). But there is a vast gulf between romantic thoughts and putting possibly inappropriate and embarrassing feelings of love into practice. So potential affairs have remained on a cerebral level.

I have been living in one relationship with a man, Cliff, for 14 years. I met him when I felt most heterosexual. We would never fully agree on the timing for having a child and now I am just 41, with regrets about having missed out on kids, as it would not be possible to conceive now.

Although there are incompatibilities, Cliff is the closest person to me. He represents huge emotional security, companionship and stability, and fulfils my desire to be loved continuously and unconditionally by one other – something I failed to experience in my background. He is my best friend and we may stay together for a long time. Sex has a low priority in the relationship, though we are definitely still physically affectionate and cuddly. I have chosen to make this lasting commitment to Cliff, yet have regularly been attracted to others. This may sound a contradiction, yet I don't think my needs can ever be met by just one person.

Fantasy

I have attempted to work through blocks and search for what was missing or unresolved in childhood. One form this took was to seek out 'mother figures'. By that I mean women whom I could fuse with, like a mother with her baby. From the age of six, there was always some girl in my class whom I idealised – I remember them all. But my greatest desire for an ideal girl found its outlet in my extraordinarily vivid imagination and memory, which has always run on the lines of a soap opera.

'She' emerged when I was ten. I created an enormous fantasy world for 'her' to function in. Bit by bit it grew and grew, 'she' being the nucleus with many other fictional female characters in some way, relating to her. Some of them represented aspects of myself and my family. I led a double existence, fantasy and reality running parallel. To a lesser degree this still applies today. My parents' sexuality played an important role in that I was exposed to too much sexual information too young.

'She' was what I wanted to be like, own, share: the ultimate existence on a symbiotic, spiritual, sexual plane, a sort of unobtainable perfection, like a personal religion. She also acted as a vehicle through which to channel my unacceptable thoughts and feelings, such as anger, randy thoughts, smut and masturbation. But she had endearing faults too. She definitely was not the 'Mills and Boon' heroine – much more human than that. I worked on her character year in, year out. I shall probably carry her around in my head and heart indefinitely, like a continuous love affair engraved on my soul. Some of my real relationships have been impaired as a result, as my fantasy life is an unintegrated part of me.

My actual life in adolescence did not seem terribly significant. My fantasies overwhelmed me and the relevant parts involved drama: the intimate, intricate friendships of these fictional girls. I always had tremendous difficulty divulging any details of my inner life and what specifically excited me about it. I did not want to give it up and so lose that magic, with its obsessive, relentless repetition and meticulous detail. At the time I never made a connection between these lesbian sexual fantasies which involved imaginary women and the schoolgirl jokes about our 'let's be friends' spinsterish staff. This subject was a complete enigma and we treated it as some sort of joke or affliction in the 1950s and early 60s.

Adolescence – Women

As I progressed through my teens, my secret life intensified. Some of it overflowed into reality and my first genuine sensual encounter was with another girl of twelve at boarding school. By night we would burrow down

our beds and caress and fondle each other's breasts. We were afraid of getting caught. She was physically more mature than I, with thick dark pubic hair, and I was envious- of her womanly body. I was disturbed and saddened that she used to separate' off these night-time encounters from her daytime contact, when she'd ignore me.

Again at twelve, I smiled across the crowded dining room on the first night of term at a new girl, exceptionally beautiful, who subsequently became the focus of my attention for the rest of my time at school. Yet she was never a close friend. She was almost as perfect physically as my own 'fantasy girl' and the facts and feelings about her got superimposed on to my 'ideal', and vice versa. But fantasy was always best. With hindsight, this school friend was the person I have ever come closest to viewing as a love object.

Men

Boyfriends were just for show and practically meaningless, while my relationships with girls were not about genital sex and had more to do with a spiritual dependence. But at seventeen I started to fancy men — both in reality and fantasy. I felt more 'normal'. But I was aware that my interest in boys had developed rather late, and I was very selective. I was extremely shy and had had very little contact with boys before then.

After two and a half years, I became obsessed with the love for one man, Paul. For three years everything else went out of the window and I put up with the on and off affair with its peaks and troughs, pain and ecstasy.

Throughout the following four years I had a number of rather unsatisfactory relationships with men. In retrospect they lacked something which indicated my latent lesbianism. Affairs with men were sexually exciting initially, but usually failed to last.

I was exclusively into men in my 20s, at least consciously, though I was convinced that the insecure, unobtainable relationships were more desirable than the stable, unchallenging ones, so I was often hurt, even after falling in love and settling with Cliff.

At 32 I had one affair with an older man – Cliff's and my boss – brief but euphoric. He was definitely unsuitable – 'macho', with a wife and teenage boys. I was just another of his several mistresses. With the close proximity and job complications, it nearly split Cliff and I up. But we had something much stronger. After this I became disillusioned with men and their typical disrespect for me as a professional woman.

My parents, sister and many friends all assume, quite incorrectly, that my long-lasting relationship reflects my sexual preference. Their resistance to fresh outlooks makes me very angry! Hiding the truth usually makes me feel aggressive and irritable, like a permanently coiled spring. Carefully guarding my tongue, I have had few to identify and empathise with, while having to tolerate all the usual, offensive, biased remarks.

My attraction towards men gradually diminished. I developed an aversion to penises, although I could be and still am attracted to the 'whole' man, especially those I know, trust and respect; particularly father figures.

I perceived sexual intercourse as unequal and threatening, with the man in the role of the aggressor. I had extremely ambivalent feelings about it all and became sexually switched off to men. The reverse was also true, as I no longer gave out the right signals and messages (however non-verbal) to men. Love-making though was still a turn on – in fantasy.

Lesbianism

Six years ago my suppressed homosexual feelings started to manifest themselves for real: first in powerful lesbian fantasies (a repeat of the adolescent ones, but more explicit); later in reality as well. It seemed exciting territory – sensuous, beautiful, fair, and not at all threatening. In 1982 I fell in love with a younger woman at Art College. It was bound to happen – love at first sight, like an enormous burst of age-long suppressed sexual energy, releasing itself in one huge explosion.

She proceeded to play emotional games with me and suddenly one day she

unexpectedly disappeared from my life forever. I thought she might. She couldn't cope with her own stirred-up, confused emotions. It was unfinished business and I still feel bitter, and haven't quite come to terms with 'what might have been'.

This was followed by my becoming infatuated with a succession of women from various groups I joined. I never let the women in question know, and feelings were not reciprocated, mostly because the people concerned were either straight or in regular relationships. I kept selecting rather attractive, tall, heterosexual women. Was I searching out someone to match my fantasy ideal? Was this a defence against unknown areas and men, or purely a reflection of my circumstances and the limited number of gay or bi-women in my social circle? Were my choices too unrealistic for my own good? When meeting a woman whom I fancied for the first time, I was always disappointed to learn that she was heterosexual. I have never taken the initiative sexually with another person, so making opportunities work in my favour is something which has totally passed me by. Much of the time, as a compromise, I have sublimated my lesbian side through minor sexual encounters with friends, physical contact, fantasy, art, women's groups and massage.

I felt rejuvenated when the tables were turned and my friend Lilly fell in love with me. It was what I needed, and although I was unable to reciprocate, I was enthralled by the stack of love letters and cards she persistently sent me. Gilly was the first woman who cared in that way and it was an incredibly good morale boost which gave me a buzz.

Learning to accept my growing desire for a strong, emotional, sexual bond and comfort from another woman has been an easy path, though predominantly an unfulfilled one.

Coming out as Bisexual

I have never had any problems acknowledging my bisexuality to myself – it has been potentially exciting and liberating. But the acceptance of my

sexual orientation by some of my friends has been a different story – a painful and ambivalent one. Some have been embarrassed or disbelieving, and have refused to discuss it. Others have devalued it. They have presumably seen me in a stereotyped position which made them feel safe.

Some established female friends have perceived it as threatening, keeping a distance and sweeping the subject under the carpet. They fear that I might make an approach towards them. The trust has gone. This experience appears to be a common phenomenon for lesbians and bisexuals. I realise that many people have far more builtin prejudices than they care to admit. Now I gravitate towards people with similar feelings whenever possible.

The idea of coming out to my parents now seems absurd. It would be inappropriate and devastating for them. Perhaps at 17 or so it would have made more sense. I may be able to overcome that hurdle with my sister, if she doesn't suspect already. It has also been a struggle for Cliff to come to terms with my bisexuality, and understandably so. He has found it a terrible blow to his masculine pride, he gets depressed, avoids discussing it and is rather defensive about the whole issue.

I have had to be selective about whom I 'confess' to, anticipating and measuring the response. It is easier to 'come clean' with a new friend or a stranger where I can start from scratch and be accepted without preconceptions and involvement. Coming from the hetero side has meant I've come out to sympathetic gays. I have found myself frequently defending gay people in discussions, yet fear seeming foolish if it escalates into a big issue or if people react with indifference.

Because I am non-scene and look reasonably anonymous and feminine I am typecast as heterosexual with all its trimmings. My lifestyle reinforces this. Only I can take the responsibility for breaking out, but it is hard to take new turnings at my age and leave familiarity behind. It is easier to keep the status quo.

I am not very political with a capital 'P' and do not wish to play an active

part in a network. I find it difficult to equate fully with either gay, straight, or even feminism. I might lose my individuality in ditching my old identity, lifestyle, philosophy and opinions in favour of new ones, thereby perpetuating my confusion. There is a contradiction for me, as I want to be accepted for myself. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why so many bisexuals (especially the older or married ones) remain firmly in the closet. Like me, they are scared of the risks involved and can only take one step at a time.

Yet all bisexuals need to work cohesively together toward greater recognition, acceptance and integration in our society. I hope this vicious circle will be broken one day, although I think society takes decades to adjust to fundamental changes. Please may it be sooner rather than later.

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Bisexuality and AIDS

BISEXUALITY AND AIDS

'THINKING ABOUT AIDS HAS MADE ME REALISE HOW important each minute of life is – much too important to waste with regrets about past troubles and future fears.'

Research and understanding about the HIV virus and AIDS itself are changing so fast that anything we might summarise here could soon be out of date.^[1] But there are aspects of the epidemic and people's responses which are specific to us bisexuals. So we will concentrate on these aspects and accounts of personal experiences and feelings.

By now we should all know the enormity of the threat of the HIV virus, the personal difficulties and challenge of becoming a carrier and the trauma of developing AIDS itself. It should be reiterated that AIDS is not a gay disease and in some places the virus and AIDS have always affected heterosexuals as much as any other group. However, in the UK as elsewhere, the spreading of the virus into the general heterosexual population has brought alarm about 'bridging groups' in contact with the concentration of the virus in the gay community.

These groups are identified as bisexuals, intravenous drug users, prostitutes, and people from highly infected areas such as parts of Africa

and the USA. Intravenous drug users have rapidly spread the virus amongst themselves by sharing needles (particularly in prison where shared needles are the only ones available). In a similar way this has happened apparently in some African countries with the medical re-use of unsterilised needles. Prostitutes are considered a high risk, especially as research suggests that the virus is more likely to pass from an infected woman to a man than vice versa,^[2] though with both women and men prostitutes,^[3] as with anyone else, the use of condoms for intercourse reduces the risk. Bisexuals, especially men, have been seen as a primary bridging group bringing the virus into the population at large. This has focused people's attention as never before on the extent of bisexual behaviour.^[4]

Up until now the fact that maybe over a third of the population has strong attractions to or sexual activities with both sexes has generally been ignored. Sexual self-identities have been seen as either heterosexual, or gay or lesbian. But in reality people are not in distinct groups. As far as disease transmission is concerned, it is actual behaviour rather than self-identity that counts and many self-identified heterosexuals and gay men and lesbians behave bisexually. Contrary to a frequent association of bisexuality with promiscuity, it is our experience that many self-identified bisexuals are recurrently celibate, and increasingly so as part of a safer sex life.

The spread of the virus initially among gay men in the USA happened before AIDS was clearly identified and transmission associated with sexual activity. Once this was established the gay communities worked to inform people of the need for 'safer sex' as certain types of sexual activity and the number of partners greatly increase the chance of spreading the virus. As a result of these warnings very many people, both virus carriers and non-carriers, now take much greater care about their own and their partners' sexual lives and general health. But it is only after years of delay and with lobbying by the medical profession that governments have begun to inform people more widely. There are many reasons for this delay, but undoubtedly one is that governments endorse heterosexual monogamy and ignore or negate homosexuality.

The result of this attitude and the widespread fear of homosexual feelings and activity, is that bisexuals, gay men and lesbians grow up with virtually no positive images of their sexuality. It is absent from or negated in every day life, education, literature and the media. As a consequence, many of us cannot but bring some of the received negative self-images to our gay relationships, thus putting them, under more stress. Whilst promiscuity is often seen as a political choice which challenges limitations on personal freedom, it is also, together with coyness, partly the outcome of this overall negation of homosexual life.

From this perspective the rapidness of the spread of the HIV virus is as much the result of the homophobia in society as anything else. Yet, all too often homosexual people have been used as scapegoats by the manipulative, the frustrated and the ill-informed. As for life-long monogamy, the tensions within so many marriages in past generations and the present high divorce-rate show that this is a cultural ideal so often at odds with the changing lives of the people involved.

The personal responses of bisexuals to AIDS have been varied. Some retreat into the closet, experiencing increased tension and the fear of becoming infected and infecting others. Here, the particular challenge is to inform and support those bisexuals, particularly men who are not 'out' and continue to live 'double lives'. These men could infect their women partners who may become pregnant and thus be more likely to develop AIDS themselves, because of the hormone and immunity changes during pregnancy, as well as passing the virus to the child.

In contrast to this many other bisexual women and men have responded to AIDS by becoming more open about their lives and more responsible about their sexual activities. Here the personal issues are often about past sexual behaviour when unaware of AIDS and safer sex practices, and about having a medical test for the virus. The essence now is sustaining and creating relationships with partners of either or both sexes where there is a dialogue about enjoying 'safer sex' and exploring more sensual as well as

sexual satisfaction. On a wider level there are bisexuals working to inform people about AIDS and safer sex and also who support people with AIDS or with the virus.

Safer Sex, in brief

Each of us has to decide just exactly what we feel is safe enough for ourselves and our partners. In the UK, unless you have been celibate or in a mutually monogamous relationship since before 1978, you cannot be sure you are HIV virus free without having a test. And an anti-body negative or virus-free result is only meaningful if you have been celibate or had only no-risk sex for at least three months^[5] before the test and then, of course, continued like that.

The boundary between relatively safe and unsafe practices has been changing as understanding of the virus grows. At the time of going to press, it is generally thought that the principle is not to exchange body fluids because, in an infected person, the virus will be present in blood and semen, as well as being in saliva, vaginal and other body fluids in smaller concentrations. The virus can then find its way into a partner's body and blood through any opening in the skin, internally or externally, such as a cut or sore. For this reason, anal sex is very high risk and vaginal sex high risk, though a condom will reduce the risk provided it does not tear or slip off. Any sex act which may cause a cut or draw blood is also high risk. Oral sex which includes wet kissing is considered low risk, although some people have openings in their gums or digestive tract through which the virus could be transmitted.^[6] Masturbation, dry kissing and body contact carry no risk.

The following are descriptions by members of our Collective of their responses to AIDS.

AIDS: ONE WOMAN'S THOUGHTS

I've been in close contact with people talking about AIDS for over a year now and it's only recently I've bothered to seriously think about it in relation to me and my body. I've just had treatment for internal warts which means no intercourse for over a month. I've had to consider sex much more thoughtfully (I did, already, a bit) and I've also had to think about my health and not just take my body for granted. I have always thought in the past 'Oh, I'm safe, I know who my lovers have slept with in the last couple of months', but what I don't always know is 'who have they slept with a year ago?'

The more I read about AIDS, the more symptoms I think I have. That seems to be the problem with a lot of people – most are fit and healthy but when they start to believe they have particular symptoms they can become ill and run down. The moment I started worrying I came out in a rash and picked up 'flu!

It's only recently that I've realised the possible consequences of not practising safer sex — I should have been thinking (and doing, something) about it months ago. I hope I'm not too late.

SAFER SEX: ANOTHER WOMAN'S POINT OF VIEW

For anybody seeking, or open to, a new sex partner I suppose the main issue to think about is safer sex. I've found this topic very difficult and confusing to consider, because although facts about the virus are gradually becoming more available they are still minimal How safe do I need to be? Is a totally safe sexual relationship possible If so, what does it mean? All these are questions my friends and I talk about a lot and different people

come up with slightly different solutions for themselves.

I've been to organised discussion groups with and without 'experts' present, had informal chats with each of my close friends and received skilled counselling from people in both high and low risk AIDS groups. Oh yes, and I've sent off for and read all the literature I can get my hands on about the subject.

Watching myself and all the others I notice that it seems very important to just talk and talk and think. Find someone else who's interested – maybe because they want to think themselves, or maybe because they are your friend and want to help YOU think. Another thing I've noticed is that attitudes and behaviour seem to change in stages rather than all at once, and there seem to be different solutions for different people. There have been people who think I am much more careful than necessary and those (my mother included) who think I take ridiculous risks.

I find the idea of being passed or passing on something that could cause AIDS so frightening that it has totally altered my own range of possibilities with ANYONE since I became AIDS conscious. Until the medical world knows more and can vaccinate against/cure HIV-related diseases I am behaving very differently.

Unless my partner has had six years of being either celibate or exclusively monogamous with a partner who is also exclusively monogamous, I consider them at risk of carrying HIV. I consider myself a risk, too, because I do not fit either category and there are so many 'unaware' carriers now in Britain. I include even lesbians as risky potential partners for unsafe sex because they may have had male partners at some time in the last six years, or bisexual women partners or untested self-insemination or even sex with another lesbian woman who had a male lover in the last six years. My lesbian friends often react with shock when I tell them this and my usual first reaction is to reassure them that, yes, lesbian sex is still the lowest risk of all the traditional sexual behaviours. But I still want to make the point that safer sex is an issue for everyone who considers having a new sex

partner in their life from now on, even if it is a case of minimising the risk of transmission rather than eliminating it altogether.

It seems important to me that everyone talks and thinks and decides what they will do BEFORE they find themselves in a sexual situation. Trying to decide what is safe at that point in time does not work. All the people I have asked are unanimous on that.

For myself I see three choices, none of which felt the least bit attractive at first. I could decide to become celibate which would be totally safe as the only sexual partner would be me. Alternatively, I could choose a partner who mutually agreed that we would be exclusively monogamous and then both of us spend three months without sex during which time we both took two HIV antibody tests. If both proved negative we could go ahead and have an 'unsafe' sexual relationship. The third choice I see open to me is the one I've chosen currently, which is to continue my lifestyle of having several relationships at once, while radically altering what we do together.

I want to eliminate risks altogether, so for a while now I have simply enjoyed sharing a bed and a naked cuddle and intimate conversation with a new lover. Caresses, massage and dry kissing, all away from the genital area, are very pleasurable and I've certainly discovered delicious new levels of sensuality and sexuality.

The difficulty of telling someone new what I want sexually is that I get very embarrassed and beat around the bush looking sheepish and giggling. But I've found a very sensitive and encouraging reaction so far, maybe because we're all used to a bit of embarrassment around sex, and it has been well worth it for each of us. This may take hours, but sometimes one of us gets very turned on and wants to reach orgasm. The answer seems to be to masturbate avoiding blood or semen contact with each other at all and then wash well straight after. So far I haven't really enjoyed this practice very much, it feels too scary. From now on, if my partner is male I will ask him to wear a condom and if I have my period I will either abstain or masturbate myself, followed by a good bath straight away. I would want a

woman lover to do the same.

AIDS awareness has caused a huge uncomfortable upheaval in my already complicated life (having several relationships at once is not easy in our society), but the benefits of safer sex and the challenge of having to deal with HIV transmission have widened my experience and even improved my life. I have learned so much about how to talk about sex (brilliant recipe for losing my nervous sexual tension, I've discovered!) The trust I've built up with people when I've discussed safe sex with them has been qualitatively stronger than before and reflected right through the rest of our friendship / relationship. To have talked about something so intimate and sharing such vulnerability together seems to make an extra bond.

Now, with safe sex there is all the time in the world to explore a closeness that I didn't know existed. Somehow, in the past, there was always a goal of intercourse or orgasm to sex. I sometimes miss this, but much more important is the new intimacy that has taken its place.

SAFER SEX AND TESTING: ANOTHER WOMAN'S EXPERIENCE

In the autumn of 1984, my boyfriend's brother flew in from San Francisco and told us about the impact that AIDS had had within the gay community there. He was part of that community, and through him, we came to realise that it was going to have a great impact in Britain too. At the time it was only getting small paragraphs in the papers.

Examining the nature and history of our past and present relationships which were in both cases bisexual, my boyfriend and I felt that a test for HIV was unnecessary. We reached this decision after seeking out the available information, including a memorable talk given to the London Bisexual Group by Tony Whitehead, chairperson of the Terrence Higgins

Trust. We also made an informed choice not to use condoms.

Certainly it was possible that either one of us might have the virus, but it appeared to be so unlikely that we were not prepared to change. I do believe that condoms can be a lot of fun – at least I've never put one on anybody without laughing – but I would feel less amused if I used them more frequently.

Only 18 months later did taking a test become an issue for us. Increasingly, I found it unsettling and anxiety-making to discuss plans for having and/or adopting children which would never happen if one of us had the virus. Obviously no plans we make in this life have guarantees, but I needed to know.

We were still in the process of rebuilding our relationship after a split, and I needed foundations of reality to build on. He was concerned about the devastating effect that a positive result would have and it was mostly for my sake that he had a test with, happily, a negative result. In fact, I had told him that I would 'propose' if he were positive, so all in all he had a narrow escape! To be tested myself seemed unnecessary now I knew that my boyfriend was in the clear. The last male partners I had had were five or six years ago. They were not in high risk groups and have to my knowledge remained in good health, as have I. Of course a small doubt remains (what about my trip to Los Angeles in 1980 which proved to be rather exciting?), but I feel that unless I wished to get pregnant it is not worth worrying about.

I'm determined to tackle what remains of my irrational fears. AIDS has been around quite a while in some parts of the world and I do feel confident that there has been enough knowledge gained to keep me accurately informed of the risks. I support my boyfriend's desire to have 'safer' sex with other men, although admittedly this does require a lot of trust. Generally I believe that men can only gain from trying to have longer-lasting involvements with their partners. We must not let fear swamp us and I hope that I don't lose potential female lovers by not going

to extremes of safety. Now I feel very lucky to have had my most sexually active period in the late seventies. It all seemed so carefree at the time.

AIDS: DIFFERENT VIEWS FROM MEN

'I've known gay friends who say that they must have had the virus by now so why stop having sex or change their behaviour. They just go on as if death were not just around the corner. Some people talk about the challenge – but the choice is between no sex life or a greatly curtailed range of activities. I used to be fairly promiscuous but having been tested and knowing I am negative I do not want to take any chances. My gay contacts are now friends. I've given up cruising the bars. There is only one person in my gay sex life now – me!'

'We mustn't be complacent about safer sex, think it is OK to take risks, to wet kiss, that it's all right if we are with wimmin. Unsafe sex should be monogamous and checked out by blood tests. We are all a danger to each other How many people have you slept with in the last six years?'

'I don't believe in the scientific view of health. When I'm loving myself properly, I don't catch anything. But it's difficult to do that all the time and so I play safe the tests mean little to me ... I took them for my partner's peace of mind.'

'I have become AIDS and safer sex conscious since my marriage ended and since last making love with a woman over a year ago. I still want that intimacy with a woman but I have felt blocked by the prospect of safer sex with condoms or no penetration, neither of which were satisfying in the past. Now I've heard what women in the group have been saying about their safer love lives, and I realise it CAN be satisfying. Also I've learnt from

my relationship with my man lover which has not been penetration-orientated and where I have changed from higher risk to other satisfying lower risk sex.

I wonder if male hetero-sex faces even greater changes than gay sex? For is not heterosexual male sex orgasm mostly synonymous with penetration, in contrast to the diversity of gay sex, and is not the 'modern' hetero male used to general freedom and unsheathed sex with the newer woman-based contraceptives?

So it seems to me that the safer sex requirements of condoms or no penetration and avoiding exchange of body fluids will lead many hetero males either to return frustratedly to using condoms or to explore more variety and sensuality – touch, body contact masturbation – in short, more similar to what I have enjoyed of gay sex.'

'From the point of view of safety, the bisexual man has an advantage over the gay, in that he might be able to concentrate more on sex with women and have less dependence on men. We are told that the fewer sexual partners we have, the safer we are likely to be. This is not easy for the man who enjoys the thrill of anonymous casual sex. Yet a case could be made for saying that this form of sex at a controlled low to medium risk level is preferable to involvement with one or two male partners at a deeper, more risky, level.

Not only will safer sex diminish the risk of the HIV virus, but also venereal diseases and hepatitis B (which appears to spread by similar means to AIDS and can be just as insidious). If this is one positive result of the AIDS epidemic, then another must be the encouragement towards being more honest and open about our sexual activities with other people. The situation needs cooperation and trust between us and our partners, male and female. If we are being tempted into risky activities we must not be afraid to admit it because talking to sympathetic ears can sometimes help

our self control. This sort of responsible attitude is essential if we are to protect ourselves and others.'

'I would like to be a father one day. If I were HIV positive then I would be putting the mother at risk as well as the baby. Effectively, if I were HIV positive, I would not feel able to father a child. The situation is worse for women. Babies have a 50% chance of being born with HIV if the mother is infected and on top of that, the child would have a further 50% chance of dying in the first three months of life. The thought of playing a game of chance with a woman's (and baby's) life is shocking. I could not take such a chance with anybody.'

SAFER SEX: ONE MAN'S POINT OF VIEW

Until having to practise 'safer sex' my definition of 'sex' would still have been roughly intercourse and orgasm orientated, with other activities such as oral sex and 'foreplay' being treated as adjuncts to screwing.

Lying about cuddling was something I did afterwards and if I skipped anything through lack of time I skipped that and had a quickie, as often as not. I would have said sex wasn't complete without a lot of touching and time to relax, but the emphasis would still have been that they were 'secondary' in some way, although my life never felt complete without a whole morning or afternoon spent in bed touching, at least once a week.

Much to my surprise, when I unwillingly started having to accept the cuddling and touching as being the important part, with intercourse restricted and often cut out altogether, I found it immensely rewarding. It is so much more difficult to relax and to enjoy intercourse when worrying about AIDS and having the use of condoms taking so much pleasure away.

I discovered that massage, which I only did for brief periods before, and lost interest in after, screwing, was something I could spend a lot of time doing and which left me and others feeling really good. Without orgasm the enjoyment of sensuality can go on and on and reach heights quite different from those of 'sexual' feeling and at least as important. Altogether it has been an unexpectedly good period in which I have been enjoying myself and other people and discovering new and fun things to do with them.

'COMING OUT' IN MARRIAGE: ANOTHER MAN'S THOUGHTS

The decision to come out to a husband or wife is part of a larger set of decisions and is a very personal one. It is going to depend on many factors, such as how confident the bisexual partner is of their own feelings, and how they feel they can stand up to responses they can only partially predict. It is going to be influenced by the people around the marriage and what is known about their possible reactions, and by what are the bisexual feels they have to gain and to lose by coming out. There is no simple formula to help this decision.

In the sense of a bisexual man who is married, the issues are made slightly different by the fact that there is more HIV among the population of gay men than there is in the lesbian population. For a bisexual wife in the corresponding position, the issue of taking responsibility for health, with outside affairs being a physical threat to the spouse, is just as important, but practically speaking the likelihood of infection by HIV is not quite so immediate at the moment.

In either case, I think the consequences for the bisexual partner are that they must act responsibly with respect to their spouse. It is all very well

taking the chance of passing on an unpleasant but temporary and non-life-threatening infection with its consequent embarrassment and treatment with drugs, but HIV is in a different category and requires more serious responses. Either the bisexual partner must give up outside attachments, or practise sex so safely that they can feel quite secure in their own mind that they are not putting their spouse at any risk, or they must be prepared to be open and to discuss the situation. Even if the sex outside the marriage were safe, it is important to consider the feelings of the spouse on subsequently discovering that their health was being decided about without their being consulted. Anyway, perfectly safe sex is not at all easy.

As to what might happen as a result of such disclosures, I am much less certain of where I stand. I can only foresee many problems, conflicts and unhappiness and the need for a great deal of support at the time.

HIV AND TESTING: ANOTHER MAN'S EXPERIENCE

I have always been concerned about my health; I worry about minor ailments. When I first came out I was quite promiscuous. I went along to the Special Clinic every so often for a check up; sometimes I had some infection, but antibiotics or some course of treatment would soon clear me up. On occasion a lover would have some problem which meant I took a quick visit to James Pringle House (a central London sexually transmitted disease clinic), and that's how I got vaccinated against Hepatitis B. There was a game-like quality to popping into the clinic – 'STOP, do not have sex, go straight to the clinic.'

But then AIDS crept into the UK and the incidence of cases rose from 10's to 100's. At first I consoled myself that I stood more chance of dying in a car accident, but that was not true for long. The gay sex I enjoyed the most

carried the most risk of catching HIV.

I started being less promiscuous and finally stopped cruising. Then I became aware of the HIV test. After much consideration, I decided that I wanted to know if I carried the virus. If I was positive then I would be able to start coping with that; if I was negative then I could keep myself that way.

The more I thought about the problems an HIV positive test would bring, the worse I felt. I would have to stop most of my favourite sexual practices; no chance of being a father; daily worry about my health; risk of having infected others; risk of some brain damage; risk of dying from AIDS. I knew that I had to find out.

Back I went to James Pringle. I talked to the doctor for a while about my decision. Then I was sent to wait to give the blood sample. I had to hold a form to give the nurse. There were some stickers attached: 'RISK OF HTLV III – CAUTION'. This brought the message home.

By the end of the two weeks, I was almost a wreck. The powerlessness of not knowing was terrible. I felt I could cope if only I knew. Thankfully, I was negative, and the experience redoubled my decision to look after my health by not contracting HIV.

The staff at the clinic respected my confidentiality and were pleasant, which all helped me to cope with the fear of testing. Though the test period was fraught, I felt a great sense of relief at knowing my health status. Thus I had a few weeks' worry and avoided years of stress.

AIDS – NOT IN VAIN: ANOTHER VIEW

My cousin has just died of AIDS in New York and this stirred many feelings

and thoughts in me. Searching for deeper meaning I wondered again why AIDS particularly for gay people in North America and Europe, and why now at this time?

What came to me as a wide overview starts with the thought that now, when men may soon destroy the earth through nuclear war or ecological abuse, a prime need is for men to love men and for all people to live together in a just celebration of life. Here, for me, is a potential contribution that liberated gay consciousness can share with all people, the realising of love of self and others in spite of oppression, traditional boundaries and the feelings of separation and fear which, especially between men, are behind our potentially suicidal conflicts and insatiability.

And why AIDS? Well, I share the view which may seem strange to many people that our entire universe is a divine being, and that we humans are unique within creation in having free will and consciousness so that we can independently rediscover our spiritual origins and so become conscious co-creators with the great spirit. However our free will and our western loss of a sense of universal wholeness have lead us to our suicidal cliff edge, where now only nature and spirit forces acting with us, can ensure the survival of earth life. Humankind has needed to experiment to the material limit but time is very short indeed now for radical changes of our way of life.

So I wonder if homosexual love in particular is being 'pushed' by AIDS to move on from the brief recent period of relative 'free love' with often a sexual and material emphasis. Not that this is intrinsically wrong as many would traditionally suggest, but I think we need to explore the wider and deeper purpose of our lives, including the homosexual part of ourselves. The suffering and challenge of AIDS seems to be leading many to do so.

This is perhaps similar to other shifts of awareness through such traumas as the world wars, Vietnam etc. The suffering of each illness, of each death, and the loss of loved ones does not change, but for me, finding this perspective on AIDS leads me to feel that in some ways it is not in vain or

meaningless and may indeed eventually serve some greater purpose.

Hospitals and clinics throughout the Country give advice on the HIV test.
The following are amongst those which can be contacted in London:

The Middlesex Hospital, James Pringle House, 73/5 Charlotte St.. W.I. (380 9xxx/x/x)

St. Mary's Hospital, Praed St. Paddington, W.2. (927 1xxx)

St. Stephen's Hospital, Fulham Road, S.W.10. (352 8xxx)

Royal Free Hospital, Pond St., N.W.3. (794 0xxx)

Royal Northern Hospital, Holloway Road., N.7. (272 7xxx)

also the Terrence Higgins Trust AIDS Helpline (3-10 p.m.) 242 1xxx

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Notes

- 1 Indeed!
- 2 It turned out to be, by far, the other way around. Men denying they had sex with other men, and so blaming their female partner for them becoming HIV+, rather than accepting they'd infected her?
- 3 In the UK at least, very high levels of condom use means that the level of HIV infection amongst female sex workers is very low. The number of HIV+ male and trans sex workers reflects the level of infection in their communities more generally.
- 4 It still took six years before the commissioning of proper government research into this, and another two years before *Behaviourally Bisexual Men* was finally published!
- 5 Modern tests now only need a month before being highly accurate.
- 6 Even the main research which suggests that it could be very low risk acknowledge that their findings are consistent with it being no risk – because oral sex is so common, especially between men, they had to make some guesses about the source of the infections they found.

Being bisexual – towards a definition

BEING BISEXUAL – TOWARDS A DEFINITION

A Bisexual Liberation Caucus

IN MAY 1986 EIGHT PEOPLE FROM THE LONDON BISEXUAL Group met to bring together their feelings and thoughts about being bisexual, the forms of oppression experienced, and the means of liberation. The purpose was to produce a collective statement, a process which could be repeated by other bisexual groups. This statement would focus what to communicate to non-bisexuals so that bisexuals become more visible and liberation is progressively achieved.

1. WHAT WE LIKE ABOUT BEING BISEXUAL

Many responses centred on freedom. We enjoy the freedom to be ourselves and to be attracted without qualms to both women and men; that is people for themselves, regardless of their sex.

We enjoy the freedom to cross gender boundaries, to get closer to any person and explore the possibilities of relationships.

We enjoy the freedom to get to know other bisexuals after years of being outsiders, to meet people who 'speak the same language' and to break out of isolation, to lose our sexual hang-ups and to challenge society's restrictions.

2. HOW BISEXUAL OPPRESSION WORKS

Bisexuals are often stereotyped as irresponsible, selfish, promiscuous, over-sexed, and so on. Often we are seen by lesbians and gays as 'copping out' and by heterosexuals as 'really homosexual'. Some people deny the validity of bisexuality and even its existence. No doubt, bisexuality does seem threatening.

We bisexuals have tended to adapt our lifestyles to others' norms and this has made it more difficult for many people with heterosexual, lesbian or gay self-identity to be open to bisexuality in others and possibly themselves. Taboos exist that discourage some people from getting close, exploring and understanding themselves and each other. This is especially true of young people when first exploring their sexualities. You particularly experience oppression if you have an open bisexual lifestyle, as do open lesbians and gay men.

3. HISTORY OF BISEXUAL OPPRESSION

Our history is of something continually denied and made marginal or almost invisible. This happens simultaneously with the direct oppression of homosexual behavior. However, increasingly, studies spanning human history acknowledge active bisexuality and the Kinsey Report of 1948, amongst others, shows over one in three people in the US having bisexual experiences and/or strong attractions, while only one in twenty-five were exclusively lesbian or gay.

On the other hand it seems that in the past women were allowed 'passionate friendships' with other women so long as these did not threaten

their relationships with men. In her book *Surpassing the love of men* Lilian Faderman writes of (Western) women celebrating as lesbians who nevertheless still had contact with men. There were similar patterns for men, for example in ancient Greece. However, while bisexuality has recently become more visible, we are at a point where the range of options open to bisexuals is again becoming more limited. This is part of the oppression of the gay community, intensified by some of the media's depiction of the AIDS scare, especially of bisexual men passing the virus to women, who may pass it to straight men and thus to a wider population.

4. INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES OF BISEXUAL OPPRESSION

Often straight friends say 'You're really straight, deep down', whilst gay friends say 'You're really gay, deep down'. Both sides are selectively listening to what they want to hear. Sometimes straight friends take a perverse interest in 'how the others live.'

I was 'out' as a bisexual for a year before I began working in a lesbian and gay centre. I was not accepted by them as I was living with a man. (I lived at a level of strong sexual and emotional suppression.)

Coming out to my parents was especially difficult. My mother's statement was 'the less you tell me, the less I shall know'.

My woman lover said 'I am a lesbian, I can't help it. You're a bisexual, you can choose.'

5. IMAGES OF BISEXUALITY

There are several main forms this takes in the straight and gay press and organisations, the media and education. Bisexuality tends to be given images of either being indeterminate and bogus, or sensationalised as a fashionable life style or seen as extra perverse and sick.

The tendency to deny the integrity of bisexuality is reinforced by the limited amount of information and writing by and about bisexuals. We tend to live unidentifiably in the heterosexual or gay or lesbian worlds with no distinct bisexual community or venues. We are often dismissed by even responsible social organisations as people with a transitory or uncommitted way of life. Many lesbians and gay men feel that those now living as bisexuals are copping out of the struggle for gay rights. Gay-identified bisexuals have to cope with 'coming out' on two fronts, to both the heterosexual AND lesbian and gay communities – 'double trouble' as the Guardian's article of February 1986 called it. But the real personal experiences of bisexuals are generally kept from public view with no mention of most bisexuals' lifestyles including long-term relationships or chosen celibacy.

Elsewhere, bisexuality may be depicted as an intriguing aspect of the fun lives of fashionable media personalities. Alternatively it has been seen as somehow very perverted and even linked to a 'criminal' state or commonly used as a target for abuse by those who are repressed and unable to cope with aspects of their own sexuality. A central issue here, as for all gay people, is the possibility of harassment or arrest.

6. IS BISEXUAL LIBERATION PROGRESSING?

There are changes in bisexual identity, both in self-identities and in some media images. There are the first open bisexual groups in Britain, Europe and the US. Here in the UK there are also the BiMonthly magazine, some counselling available and meetings and conferences where people can meet to share more fully. There is the value of bisexuals' 'coming out' within organisations to individual people they know.

More is now written about bisexuals. For example the historical biographies which identify ever more people who were bisexual, from Alexander the Great to Virginia Woolf. There are the few television programmes and newspaper articles, notably in the Guardian, seeking to

inform about bisexual experience. There are the wellknown personalities who identify as bisexual and become public examples of bisexuality as a positive option. These all act on people's good sense and show that we are not here to fill others' expectations.

7. FURTHERING BISEXUAL LIBERATION

We can aim to be a positive presence in lesbian and gay centres and groups, being bisexual workers and counsellors with the goal of having bisexual seats on committees etc. Within the Women's Movement we can contribute, perhaps especially in healing the split between women of different sexualities – as well as aiming for bisexual liberation. We can work similarly in the other organisations and networks of which we are members.

Within local boroughs, colleges, universities, even youth clubs and schools, we can work to have bisexuals included in gay policies, so that attitudes to bisexuality improve and people can come to their own informed choice.

At a national level the need is for real understanding and positive images of bisexuality to be presented in the media by mean of representation by active bisexuals.

And, of course, bisexual people can set up more of their own counselling services, local centres and conferences.

8. THE OPPRESSION WHICH WE HAVE INTERNALISED

In the London Bisexual Group we have all experienced the support we can give each other in releasing received negative images – we need never again be victims or collude with any oppressive messages We must learn to really listen to each other's experiences so that the layers can peel off and the wounds helped to heal by support groups, therapy techniques, games, co-counselling, massage, dance, drama etc.

We should always avoid any images of a 'right on' bisexual because this is limiting and makes new oppressions. We should remember it's OK to be as gay or straight as we each wish, not ashamed to enjoy all and any aspects of ourselves, delighting in being a responsive partner to anyone we choose. Let us be relaxed, light hearted and proud in being bisexual.

A Bisexual Manifesto

Since 1984, successive bisexual conferences and meetings have made a recurrent commitment to produce a manifesto about ourselves and our aims as bisexuals.

The following two manifestos were produced by different groups at the Bisexual Conference in London in December 1984. The aims in education expressed in them have now received a major setback with the government circular on sex education of September 1987 (see Introduction).

BISEXUAL MANIFESTO

Bisexuals are people who experience the desire for emotional, sensual and/or sexual relationships with people of both sexes, though not necessarily to an equal extent or at the same time.

We believe in sexual and emotional liberation for all individuals irrespective of race, sex, class, age and disability, particularly from the predominant categorisations of heterosexual or homosexual, on the understanding that this liberation does not cause emotional or physical damage to others.

Because we believe the struggle is, above all, for liberation of homo-erotic love it is important for bisexuals to be politically active within the Gay Movement, working towards the reconstruction of sexuality without

repression.

Our aims are:

1. To enable bisexuals to achieve a positive identity.
2. To work to replace society's prejudices against bisexuality with an understanding and acceptance of it.
3. To work for an education in all schools which properly presents the range of sexual orientations.
4. To challenge in the media negative representations of different sexualities.
5. To support the elimination of sexism in all its forms.
6. To support other sexual liberation movements whose aims are consistent with our own.
7. To foster links between bisexual individuals and groups, nationally and internationally, to encourage the formation of further groups and to support the publication and broadcasting of material which contributes towards these aims.

THE MANIFESTO OF THE RADICAL LESBIAN AND GAY IDENTIFIED BISEXUAL NETWORK

Bisexuals are people who are oriented towards emotional and sexual relationships with people of both sexes.

We strongly support sexual freedom: the freedom of all people, regardless of age, sex or disability, to explore and define openly their own sexual styles, homosexual, bisexual, celibate, heterosexual, monogamous, promiscuous, and non-monogamous, with others who share the same freedom and consent. This includes the right to refuse sexual contact with anyone for any reason, and the rights of women and men to control their own fertility.

We believe that the prevailing heterosexist ideas about sexuality have created restrictive and damaging categories into which the diversity of human sexuality does not fit. We believe that bisexuality challenges the order and origins of these categories. However whilst this sexual oppression exists, it is vital for bisexuals, lesbians and gay men to organise politically around their self-defined sexual identities. So it is important for bisexuals to be politically active within the lesbian and gay movement, working towards the reconstruction of sexuality without oppression.

We believe that sexual oppression is both a result of and an integral part of our patriarchal and capitalist society. Therefore we recognise the links between the oppression of people because of their sex, sexuality, gender identity, disability, race, age, class, nationality or religion, and their oppression linked with class and economic status.

Our aims are:

1. To give bisexuals a strong, valid identity within the Lesbian and Gay Liberation Movement in particular, and society in general. In order to achieve this we must work as bisexuals within the Movement both autonomously and collectively.
2. The elimination of sexism, heterosexism and male-defined sexuality and all other forms of oppression.
3. To remove the power which adults have over children and young people, so that children and young people have the right to define their own lives and sexuality. Included in this is the provision of an education which adequately reflects the diversity of human sexuality.
4. To create a positive image of differing sexualities and sexual attitudes within the media. This necessitates representative and participatory community control of the media. Also to create a media and a culture of our own.
5. To actively work for the self-organisation of bisexual people and the co-ordination of existing bisexual groups, and to form alliances with other progressive forces, nationally and internationally.

Other Contributions

(mainly taken from Bi-Monthly Magazine)

BREAKING THE MOULD

by David Smith

reprinted from Bi-Monthly October/November 1985

The study of bisexuality is at the spearhead of a movement to break the mould forced onto sexuality by scientists and social commentators. This is the view of Philip Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz of the Department of Sociology at the University of Washington, USA. They feel that the way scientists and the population view sexuality can be transformed by the proper consideration of bisexuality.

Even a cursory study of bisexuality throws serious doubt on traditional notions that sexual orientation and sexual identity are unchanging and unchangeable. Blumstein and Schwartz found that people could change these without even being aware that it was possible. Childhood and adolescent experiences were by no means the final determining factors. These findings have enormous implications for an argument which has been raging in the world of psychology and sociology for over a century.

Freud first came up with the idea of bisexuality as a natural state, but there has always been disagreement about whether homosexuality is biological or at least determined in childhood or whether it can be 'acquired' at any time in the course of one's life. Law-reformers, quoting psychologists, most often stressed the notion that homosexuals were 'born like that' and 'couldn't help it' and thus it was inhuman to persecute them. To admit that

sexual orientation is not fixed, invites the demand that it should be made as difficult as possible for people to 'become homosexual'.

Consequently the concept of bisexuality was often deliberately ignored.

In their study of 156 bisexual women and men, Blumstein and Schwartz were interested in four major questions. First, is bisexuality a continuous, preordained theme throughout a person's life, or does it emerge and change with circumstances? Second, what are the complex factors which lead to a person's self-definition? Third, which circumstances are most conducive to bisexuality? Fourth, do women and men differ with regard to the first three questions?

In investigating the complexities of choosing a label to describe one's sexuality, it was found that actual sexual activity doesn't necessarily bear any relation to the labels chosen. These seem to be randomly rejected, accepted or imposed for a wide variety of different reasons. And the relative importance of sexual attraction, sexual experiences, love and affection differed enormously from person to person.

Among the circumstances conducive to bisexuality, the study highlighted threesomes; ideological positions for example humanism, libertarianism and feminism; and sex with close friends. The latter seemed to be the most appropriate for women.

Two major differences between women's and men's reactions to bisexuality are highlighted. Women appear to be less likely than men to adopt a gay identity as a result of just a few homosexual experiences. But their first lesbian sexual experiences tended to be much less traumatic than first gay experiences for men, who were often concerned about the implications for their masculinity.

Those who took part in the study were students at the university and friends of friends among members of local bisexual groups. As an aside, Blumstein and Schwartz predicted a great increase in the size of the visible

bisexual community. But this research is already a few years old and who knows when the suggestion for further work will be taken up.

LET'S ABOLISH THESE CATEGORIZING TERMS

by John Edmunds

reprinted from Bi-Monthly February/March 1986

I don't often go to parties. I don't like having to give just a little of myself to a lot of people; the inevitable superficiality; the noise, bustle, heat and loud music. Wow! I once went 12 years without suffering these aspects of parties. But here I was at a farewell shindig for a couple of friends about to go roughing it for two or three weeks in Africa, and I'd succumbed – felt duty-bound.

Neil drifted over, as I'd hoped (and secretly known) he would. A little earlier we'd exchanged 4-yard-apart hellos and waves; now we were just easing our way into a chat when suddenly he hit me amiably with, 'So what are you, John – gay or bisexual? I mean, you don't mind me asking do you? Say if you do?'

It was good that he felt he could ask me a straight (sorry for the pun) question like this. We'd been talking about orientation with a woman feminist friend a few days before, and he'd obviously been thinking things over. This was a mixed party, by the way, both in terms of gender and orientation. (Well, aren't they all?)

In answer to Neil's question, what am I? – homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual (or non-sexual?) let's take the sliding scale. In these terms I'd be graded 8 or 9 right now – i.e., attracted mainly to men (my own sex), but with always the vague possibility of taking off with a woman. And

tomorrow – who knows where I'd be graded then?

How about the terms – heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual? I don't like them because:

- a) they sound medical
- b) they suggest lust, sexual activity, with a lack of emotional involvement.

'OK,' you say, 'how about "gay"?' Ridiculous! For a start I love the word 'gay' in its correct usage – I imagine flowers, sunshine, laughter, happiness, fun, young children carefree in the countryside, celebration of life. So sometimes homosexuals DO have times like that (so does everyone else lucky enough), but are we capable ONLY of frivolity? I hope not, although the Gay Scene certainly promotes this image to society in general, more's the pity. Perhaps this word 'gay' is one small reason society doesn't take us seriously, even in certain 'liberal' cliques.

Maybe just around the corner is a Parliamentary bill outlawing discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. The chance for everyone to be openly somewhere on the sliding scale 1-10 (and sexual or non-sexual) could be closer than we dream of. If it does happen, let's abolish all these categorizing terms and not make assumptions about ourselves or others.

I'm happy to wait until I meet someone, woman or man, and see how I feel about them as an individual. Such a variety is available within a relationship that we shouldn't go into one with expectations, but keep an open mind and let things happen.

HEY, SISTERS! WHAT ABOUT US?

by Jackie Roberts

reprinted from Bi-Monthly April/May 1985

I've just finished reading Bi-Monthly. It's the first I ever really realised you were out there! I'm feeling strengthened, so able to put pen to paper. I have identified as bisexual for at least six years to myself and for the last year to close friends – although I must confess to have played around with 'ambiguity' for quite a while before that. I often feel the inadequacies and dislike the label as it has been so misunderstood and seems inexpressive of my own personal politics. I am in my early twenties, a white feminist working in academic research on media analysis. As someone who is usually very sociable with loving friends near at hand I find myself for the first time in years almost alone in a strange city, in a new job and with a growing lack of confidence as far as meeting people goes.

I can remember having fantasies about women – usually witches and fairies!! – at an early age, which looking back were definitely sexual and also having particularly inept sexual encounters with school-girl friends, which were heavily heterosexually oriented – male-female role-play. Although I always ended up playing the boy and at the same time knew I was really playing the girl too! I always felt physically and mentally attracted to women and went through emotional hell in my late teens because I couldn't talk about it to anyone and lived in daily fear of someone being able to read my thoughts. I also became fairly promiscuous, getting used by a lot of men, usually with painful consequences – many of which did not surface until I became very depressed in my first year at college.

I have never really 'given up' on my sexuality; I knew it was there and never really denied it to myself, even though it may have sometimes got buried underneath the apparent heterosexuality and fear of rejection, especially from women friends, until a while ago. I now see my sexual identity as a powerful and political statement – a refusal to be bound by society's expectations and norms; a state of emotional and sexual freedom, not rigidly defined; not promiscuity, just openness. I see it for me as a state where sex isn't seen as the ultimate goal and where touching doesn't always stop at a friendly hug for fear of misinterpretation; where passionate

friendships with both sexes are seen as 'normal'. I am proud of who I am.

It annoys me so much when we are put down or ridiculed, made to feel 'incomplete' because we are neither at one extreme nor the other. It especially saddens me when lesbian women put down bisexual women. I support separatism and women-only spaces and I can understand hatred and distrust of men (gay and straight) — I've felt it so much myself — but I hate it when one group of women alienates other women when they need support so badly and not rejection. The Women's Movement must fight against ageism, classism, racism and unfair discrimination against sisters with disabilities and lesbians; so why are bisexual women ignored so often and made to feel rejected?

Feminists become full of guilt when their prejudices are pointed out to them, but why is it that the refusal of the Women's Movement to actively discuss bisexuality — to any positive degree anyway — does not make feminists feel they are hurting a lot of their sisters? I hate the feeling of knowing I have to justify my sexuality, of feeling guilty because I'm not easily defined and can't easily be explained. I'm not a mystery to myself; only to other people.

I have never really had close contact with men and women who are actively bisexual, not so I could talk openly to them, and I feel I have come to the point where I need this so badly. I feel frustrated that I've never really been able to speak to someone who completely understands how I feel. I want to share ideas, frustrations, strength, warmth, feel fully accepted as a whole being where my sexual orientations aren't hidden. I want to be involved with developing a sexual politics with others who have been through some of the same things — especially other young men and women.

I'm sick of people getting away with the idea that only pop stars are bisexual and that that's OK — usually when it's male stars though! However when it comes to us 'ordinary' folk, we're seen as perverts. Well, I'M not a pervert — I have to come into contact with perverts most days of my life, so I can recognise one when I see one!

I refuse to be ridiculed, silenced, patronised, misunderstood or put down any more. I have fought for years as a feminist to reject these oppressive devices and now I've got to stand up as a 'whole' person to fight for the right to be openly bisexual in the gay and lesbian world, in the feminist world, in the straight world – wherever – in the whole world.

COMING OUT

reprinted from Bi-Monthly December 1985/January 1986

I am a twenty-two year old bisexual woman with two young children. If I tell my story maybe one of your readers could give me some advice, for I know there must be more people like me.

At the age of 11 or 12 I was seen kissing a 14 year old school friend. After that I was always picked on for being gay. After I started dating boys at 16, some of the name-calling stopped.

At 17 I started going out with the leader of the local motorbike gang of which I was a part – along with a young woman for whom I had very strong feelings.

I soon fell for my first child and married. Sixteen months later, expecting my second, we split up and divorced. Only later I found out that the young woman was gay and that was when I could no longer contact her. I knew by then that I couldn't go on pretending much longer.

A year or so later I found a small ad in the local paper giving a number to ring, if you needed to talk to someone about being gay. After two weeks when I had the nerve I rang up.

I had a relationship with a young woman, but she thought that you had to be gay or straight but couldn't be bi.

Since then I have had a relationship with a bisexual woman but I still feel I can not tell everyone about myself. I met a young woman the other week in hospital. She was a patient (like me) but also a nurse. I had plenty of time to get to know her and she is totally against gays. I found her very attractive but how can I tell her? How do I not tell her? I find a lot of times I meet people I just can't tell and it makes me confused.

I may not have told this very well but I'm sure there are lots of people nodding their heads and saying, Yes I know how you feel.

HETEROSEXUAL PRIVILEGE

reprinted from Bi-Monthly June/July 1985

Picture the scene – a spring day in Hull, warm sunshine (well, fairly warm!), sunlight on the grass of Queen's Gardens, the park in the centre of the city. On Tuesday lunchtime I meet my male lover in his lunch-hour and we sit on the grass, hold hands, hug, kiss, talk. No-one takes a blind bit of notice.

Later I return to the same spot with a female lover. We lie down quietly and chat.

My lover Look at those guys staring.

(I refuse to look.)

Woman (about our age – early twenties) Fucking lemons! ('lemon' is a Hull derogatory colloquial term for lesbian.)

My lover She's gone to that policeman.

(I don't believe it.)

Policeman (coming over, very macho, blocking out the sunlight.) I've had a complaint about you.

Me We're not doing anything.

(I refuse to get up off my back which makes me feel at a disadvantage,

hence the defensive answer. So it goes on. What it boils down to is that if he gets another complaint, he'll move us on.)

Me But what if we still haven't done anything?

(It seems that doesn't matter. A complaint's a complaint.)

Who said lesbianism wasn't illegal? And who was it who wasn't sure about heterosexual privilege? (Could it have been me?)

200 DISCUSS BISEXUALITY AT UNIVERSITY

by Sally Knocker

reprinted from Bi-Monthly December 1985/January 1986

Inspired by my first visit to the London Bisexual Group this summer, I went back to University determined to break the 'Bi Taboo'. I received mildly surprised encouragement and tentative interest from Gay Soc who gave a position to Bi-Monthly on their stall and organised an open meeting.

Two hundred students attended to hear four gay people express both the positives and negatives of coming out and staying out.

This was an opportunity to open up discussion on bisexuality during question time. I confess it would not have been so easy to stand up and speak had it not been clear that the general atmosphere was largely sympathetic. I also noted that probably every person at the meeting had a different position on the broad spectrum of sexuality.

I took a deep breath and approached the microphone. I hope I adequately voiced the neglect of the bisexual phenomenon and rejected the polarised labels which my gay friends implied when talking about homophobia.

I stressed my strong empathy for gay people and admitted with regret that

it had been easier in the past to enjoy heterosexual privilege. I hoped that by openly declaring my bisexuality I would be exposing myself to all that gay students face on campus.

After my speech the Women's Officer stood up and echoed my feelings in a very moving and personal way. She hoped to form a discussion group.

I have to say it was probably the most frightening thing I have ever done. I suffered from paranoid delusions afterwards, that I was being stared at with everything from disgust to incredulity.

A special bisexuality evening followed attended by fifty women and men. We covered an enormous range of topics with emotional fervour. However my impression was that very few were prepared to openly identify as bisexual. Two professed straight men referred to homosexual experiences as only part of their adolescence. Several women and men implied that they were not shutting off the possibility of same sex relationships, even if they were not actively pursuing them.

A number of my gay friends who attended, admitted occasional attraction to the opposite sex. This appeared to worry them. They emphasised that a more clear cut position gave them a position 'from which to fight', and that they couldn't handle the confusion of bisexuality. Bisexuals amongst us tried to argue that you don't necessarily need a specific label to be strong. I couldn't help feeling that in categorising ourselves and having such groups we were admitting our own underlying fallibility, the need to belong and be accepted.

A week later a S/HE meeting (The University's Antisexist Society) had a general discussion on 'attitudes to sexuality', but far fewer people attended; and only four men. I began to get worried that we could 'overdo' the sexuality debate and, that possibly meetings should be more spread out.

Having made an issue of my own sexuality in public I confess I was also afraid of it taking over, since my commitment to my degree and

involvement in the Peace Movement and local voluntary work were equally strong important parts of me.

I was pleased however that at last I was hearing the word bisexual in everyday conversation. I was not sure though whether to be happy when a bloke came up to me on campus and told me that he had been to a party the evening of the Gay Soc meeting and ALL the men were coming out as bi. I felt as if I'd started some trendy epidemic, rather than anything permanent and meaningful – a tendency amongst young people I feel.

From a selfish point of view I gained a lot from hearing women and men echo the feelings I had suppressed for a long time. I felt great pride and relief that declaring my sexuality had made no difference in my relationships with friends. They have stood by me unquestioningly.

The women I live with have coped well with homophobic suggestions that they should 'lock their doors at night'. Such jokes stab hard but at least I began to, more than intellectually, understand the biting prejudices that gay people have to put up with daily.

Bisexual students are now at last creeping out of their heterosexual hideaways, but it does take time. Presently we are not actually going to start a specific Bi Soc, believing that meetings with Gay Soc and S/HE are providing adequate forum for discussion.

IMPRESSION OF THE SECOND NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON BISEXUALITY

reprinted from Bi-Monthly June/July 1985

I've decided to write a 'personal' response because I find I can't separate my personal feelings about the weekend from a 'critical' view of the conference

as a whole. For me, living in Hull and having felt very isolated, the most important thing, and the one that kept me high through most of the weekend, was the chance to talk with, to share with other bisexuals, to know I am not alone!

It was really important too to hear for the first time the terms 'lesbian and gay-identified bisexuals' and to know that my own instinct to 'identify' as lesbian, while wanting to be accepted and acknowledged as bisexual, had a political validity and context which others were long aware of.

The issues I addressed over the weekend, in workshops and in conversation, were mostly ones I had already touched on in my own thoughts but, on my own, not got very far with. Working on them with other bisexuals, both with similar and different perspectives to myself, meant I could go further, feel stronger and more able to take leaps, to accept myself and to begin to understand others in a new way.

We didn't find any 'answers', no conference 'line' was reached (we were too divergent and, dare I say, too honest for that) but, for me at least, there was an increased clarity, an increased positiveness about my sexuality and about myself as a WHOLE person. And the openness and trust I felt at times during the conference was something rare and incredibly special.

A TRANSSEXUAL VIEW by Vee van Dam

I am interested in bisexuality, not so much because I'm a 'practising' bisexual but because I'm interested in male-female issues, including transsexuality, as they arise for different people – biologically, emotionally, mentally and otherwise.

I remember a recurrent fantasy I used to have when I was a kid in which I thought of myself as a boy during daylight and a girl by night. Later (when

I was about 23) this surfaced again as a desire to be female, and this led me into considering all sorts of things which I had not previously explored. Somehow I did not feel 'right' as a male, or at least I felt more in affinity with the idea of being a woman, or alternatively androgynous. The problem with androgyny is that there was, and for that matter still is, no place for it in society, and physically (outside of various types of cases of hermaphroditism) it doesn't truly exist as an identifiable physical and biological reality.

I subsequently spent much time in meditation looking into the female side of myself, and in fact learned a lot. I also found it confusing and disorienting at an emotional level because I could not be female at a physical level, at least short of going through a sex change operation. I finally reached a crescendo at which point I found within myself the strength to consider the reality of a sex change; then I read up on it, and began to appreciate the difficulties involved – interfacing with psychiatrists and counsellors, and hormone therapy for five years or so, plus the problems inherent to surgical manipulation of that kind. That didn't appeal to me, at least not in view of the present situation and clinical methods used.

Therefore I started to look at other ways of achieving approximately similar ends, and delved into ancient records with regard to transmutation – a stage of unfoldment where one effectively learns and then masters the dematerialisation of the physical body and then rematerialisation of the etheric blue-print of that body, or of the astral body 'made dense' – dense enough at any rate to become tangible at a physical level. Once one begins to look for this type of data it is surprising how much does exist, even in print. The next trick then becomes a matter of learning to shape the astral body to one's specifications prior to initiating transmutation and the materialisation of that astral body. In this I had a head start since I have been projecting out of the body for over twenty years, at first without any conscious control over these events, then I learnt how to project more or less at will.

In 1974 for the first time I quite spontaneously changed from male to female shape/body while in astral 'flight' – I just thought of it and it happened; no real effort was involved. From then onwards I experimented with this quite liberally, and had at least the satisfaction of roaming about the astral plane in a female body and therefore was able to experience my femaleness in relatively objective terms – for short durations at least.

What particularly struck me about these experiences is, (1) I always resumed the same female body shape and temperament as if it was second nature and a very real part of me at that level; (2) the experience of being female put me more or less directly in touch with devic perspectives of reality (The devic world is that of the spirits which manifest and dwell in all aspects of the nature world – plants etc. This world is only accessible through our intuitive (female) aspect.) This then led me into exploring what devas are, particularly in relationship to us as human beings; (3) I started to remember segments of past lives when I had been female and which lives had been strong and interesting. This helped me to understand more about why I felt so female-oriented, especially at an emotional and sexual level. I also looked into the androgynous side of things and found some equally interesting perspectives on that, although none of them had anything to do with physical incarnation on this planet.

While this might not fit too much with what passes as bisexuality, I feel there are some indications here as to why people can feel both or alternatively male and female and experiment with bisexuality. I think it would be fair to say that bisexuals vary in their reasons for or attraction towards bisexuality, and that a sizeable proportion feel somewhat put out by being apparently confined to one sexual identity without the opportunity to experience both ends of the spectrum – as males and as females – at which point bisexuality dovetails near enough into transsexuality.

POEM: UNLABELLED by Cora Greenhill

'The problem is' has no isness
isn't there like the cat on the wall suddenly, from nowhere – is more like
the wall blocking off
what it has no business to block off – other gardens, other ways of life.
(Your problem is, you're greedy)

Your problem is
and I feel myself distorted needs defined by other damaged minds.

(You have to choose,
you can't have your cake and eat it)

If the problem has an answer
the answer is defined by the problem. Join the dots and find the picture.

(You can't align yourself with men AND women. We must know where
your commitment lies)

He is
himself
broad as a beach for me a place to rest on stretch in
spoilt for space
in all that warmth.

(He's the answer to your problem he's the answer to your prayer you want
him with you always you're alone when he's not there)

She is
herself vivid as cat
arrived in the kitchen assuming milk and affection bringing catness owing
nothing on leaving.

(The problem is
where did she come from? which door did I leave open? which wall did she

scale? who's is she?

is she healthy?

what will we do with her? where will she sleep?)

She is

here now

inescapable as hawthorn flowers filling the lanes

swelling my veins heart head and loins.

(The problem is

why wasn't she there before?

how can we let her in now, when the house is full? If she's the answer, she
should have come when you had the problem

when doors banging in the night were taunting terrors undermining
loneliness.

Where was this sisterlove then?)

I am, she says,

here now, when the bowl is full.

Look how fat and sleek you are! You feed me from your fullness.

Why should I come when you'd have grabbed any scrawny cat
to your famished breast?

He is

not, it seems, the usual lover

who offers the sham abundance

of those grandparents' tea tables, where you take the nearest cake
don't reach over

and the wrapped chocolate biscuits are kept for later (or probably
somebody else)

You're a lucky girl, aren't you?

Are you good?

Joyless we suck our fingers

feeling like caught thieves

hiding our greedy needs.

He is
a neighbour to my heart easing through labour
the passage of our growing tender -ly touching the turning tendrils of
sweetpeas to supports strengthening the stems of my trust
softening and sweetening my soil.

He roots for me.

(The problem is he's a man)

The problem is
reflects the world's distress the mouth dry with fear
the pre-packed wrong notes replace the song fresh from the oven.

Real choices are
when alternatives are clear as cakes and it's OK to want both.

We are
the mothercats
feeding all the generations wanting feeding ourselves we feed ourselves,
each other we are learning
and sometimes we need to steal for ourselves
and sometimes we are given.

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Further Information (Bisexual groups and contacts)

FURTHER INFORMATION

TELEPHONE COUNSELLING

T *HIS ARTICLE HAS BEEN REPRINTED FROM BI-MONTHLY
February/March 1986.*

Over the last four and a half years David Burkle has borne the brunt of the telephone counselling and information work for the London Bisexual Group. In this article he assesses his own contribution and suggests a strategy for extending the service.

Anyone actively involved in running a bisexual group will inevitably be contacted by people seeking counselling.

Many of those who telephone or come to a meeting for the first time have never told anyone about their bisexual feelings or behaviour, have never discussed their sexual and emotional longings or uncertainty and therefore have never knowingly met other bisexual or gay people. To do these things will be a great relief for them – if they are welcomed, listened to non-judgmentally, encouraged to feel good about this previously hidden part of themselves and helped to work out for themselves what their options are and

how they might change their lives for the better.

This in simple terms is what counselling is, and for a bisexual group to function effectively as a support group, all its members should be aware of their collective and ongoing responsibility for counselling.

At the meetings of the London Bisexual Group we have tried to meet this need by organising a 'personal group' as an option for people to take part in rather than listening to a guest speaker. Sometimes this has not been possible due to lack of space and insufficient people willing to regularly lead such groups, but there is a consistent demand for this opportunity to talk. We have never provided face-to-face counselling as a service, though many of us have given it from time to time as an element of conversation or as friendships develop.

Since the Group started we have always had a telephone contact available. For the three months before the London Bisexual Group's first meeting in September 1981 my phone number was used in small advertisements in Time Out^[1] and Gay News announcing the event. The calls flooded in, bringing normal life to a standstill and driving the rest of the household insane. That first meeting, for which 80 people turned up, is still the largest we have had.

The calls in that period were from a very wide cross section of people, but there was a noticeable proportion from people who equated bisexuality with a wild swinging time and instantly available sex. Often this only became apparent towards the end of a long call. Since those early days we have only publicised our telephone contact numbers in gay publications, on leaflets we send to people who write to us and with other counselling organisations and switchboards who can refer people to us. When a woman's number was publicised even in this limited way, she would receive nuisance calls from men pursuing the myths that bisexual women are the sexiest and 'wow – just think how much better for me two women at once would be.' So now the women's contact numbers are given to women only.

The average number of calls I receive is about twenty a week. Of these about 25% are just seeking information about the Group or where to meet bisexual

people at times other than Monday evenings – and 75% are to some extent counselling calls, people who want to talk about their own situations. Calls from women make up approximately a quarter of the total and over half are from men living with or married to women who have not been told about their partner's sexuality. Some of these men have been involved in sexual activity and relationships with other men for several years, others, often quite late in life, become increasingly aware of their desire to do so, particularly the desire to be the passive partner, made love to by another man. A high proportion of them express continuing love for their wives, not as 'cover', but as people who 'wouldn't understand' or 'would be devastated'. The remaining calls are from couples seeking other couples, gay men wanting to be less exclusively gay, transvestites, and bisexual men specifically wanting to meet bisexual women.

There are several disadvantages in operating a telephone counselling service from home and it may come as a surprise to some people that it is done at all. Many support groups have started in this way. The advantages are that it costs very little other than your own time and that someone can be available almost continually within predetermined limits. The wider these limits of course, the greater the likelihood that some calls will come at highly inconvenient moments. Your caller may have taken weeks or years to pluck up courage to phone and gone to extensive lengths to set up a situation where time and privacy are available, and you as a counsellor have to deal with it effectively whether you have five minutes to spare before washing your hair or the fifty minutes that it may need. Your callers must not be aware of your irritation that you are going to be late for your lover yet again or they are unlikely to take up your suggestion to call you later.

There could be an intermediate arrangement between our present one of two or three people operating a helpline whenever they happen to be at home and setting up a fully independent bisexual switchboard. This arrangement would consist of a larger group of people each making a regular commitment to do the job at specific times. Callers would then be referred from a central number to the person on duty at that time.

*Since this article was written, the Edinburgh Bisexual Group have set up a Bisexual
Phoneline*

BISEXUAL PHONELINE 031-557 xxxx (Thursdays, 7.30-9.30 p.m.)

LONDON LESBIAN & GAY SWITCHBOARD 01-837 xxxx

LESBIAN LINE 01-251 xxxx

TERRENCE HIGGINS TRUST (AIDS Helpline) 01-242 xxxx (3-10 p.m.)

LEEDS AIDS HELPLINE 0532-444xxx (Mondays & Thursdays, 7-9 p. m.)

GAY LEGAL ADVICE 01-253 xxxx (Monday-Friday, 7-10 p.m.)

BISEXUAL GROUPS AND OTHER CONTACTS

BRITAIN

BI-MONTHLY – the magazine for bisexuals. Write to: [no longer valid].

Obtainable from alternative bookshops nationwide.

MEN'S ANTI-SEXIST NEWSLETTER exists as a forum for exchange of news, ideas, thoughts, feelings and information for men who are challenging sexism and particularly for people who wish to find for men alternative roles to those which society casts for them. Write to: MAN, [no longer valid], Cardiff.

THE FEMINIST LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CENTRE works to provide information facilities on subjects of importance to women and the Women's Movement. They possess many facilities including a newsletter every two months. The library is open to non-subscribers but membership is necessary to borrow books. Subscriptions vary according to income. Write to: [no longer valid] London WC2 6PA. Tel 01-930 xxxx.

LONDON BISEXUAL GROUP [at that point, met] every Monday, 8.30 p.m.,

at the Fallen Angel, [no longer valid], N.1. (nearest tube – Angel). Write to:
LBG, [no longer valid].

LONDON BISEXUAL WOMEN'S GROUP, write to: [no longer valid] London
WC1N 3XX.

BISEXUAL AND MARRIED GAYS GROUP, Phone: Nigel 01-558 xxxx (5.30-10
p.m.)

SIGMA is a support group for relationships where one partner is gay or
bisexual. Details from Gay Switchboard 01-837 xxxx.

BISEXUALS IN NALGO, write to: [no longer valid].

EDINBURGH BISEXUAL GROUP [at that point, met] every Thursday, 8 p.m.,
at the Lesbian and Gay Community Centre, 58a Broughton Street, Edinburgh
EH1 3SA [no longer valid] (no disabled access). Write to this address for
further information or send an sae to join the Pen-Pal Scheme [no longer
available]. The Bisexual Phonenumber (see above) operates a contact service.

MANCHESTER BISEXUAL GROUP, Write to: [no longer valid] or Phone:
Paul Owen, 061-228 xxxx (2-4 p.m.)

MANCHESTER WOMEN'S BISEXUAL GROUP meets monthly [no longer
valid]. Write to: Viv, [no longer valid].

Other Groups are in the process of formation. Contact the Bisexual
Phonenumber for further information.

EUROPE

NETHERLANDS – Landelijk Netwerk Biseksualiteit, [no longer valid],
Amsterdam (Phone: Vroomshoop 05498-xxxxx).

WEST GERMANY – Erika Kocher, [no longer valid] Frankfurt-A-M 90
(Phone: 010 49 69 761xxx).

Die Lade, 'Bi-Initiative', [no longer valid], Berlin 44 (Phone: 010 49 030 6243xxx).

UNITED STATES

CHICAGO – Chicago Bi-Ways, [no longer valid?], Chicago, Ill. 60605.

EAST COAST – Boston Bisexual Women's Network, [still going!], Cambridge, Ma 02140.

Boston Bisexual Men's Network, [no longer valid?], Cambridge, Ma 02238.

East Coast Bisexual Network, [no longer valid?], Cambridge, Ma 02140.

Melis Alliance, [no longer valid?], Philadelphia, Penn 19137.

University of Massachusetts Bisexual Group, [no longer valid?], Ma 01002.

NEW YORK – Bisexual Support Group, c/o Bill Himmelhoch, [no longer valid?], New York, NY 10034.

The Bulletin Board, [no longer valid?], New York, NY 10150.

WEST COAST – Arete, [no longer valid?], Van Nuys, Ca 91408.

Bi Forum, [no longer valid?], San Diego, Ca 92103.

San Francisco Bisexual Centre, [no longer valid?], San Francisco, Ca 94117.

CANADA

MONTREAL – Les Capables Bisexual Group c/o Marcus, [no longer valid?], Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3G 2M9.

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Notes

- 1 As I discovered when looking for how I first heard about the LBG, that can't be right: workers at *Time Out* went on strike in April that year when the publication's 'equal pay for everyone' policy was ended and there were no issues between then and after the start of September. So where else did David advertise?

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Notes

1 Turned out to be a pseudonym for Julian Barnes!

A final word

A FINAL WORD

FINALLY, HERE'S WHAT WE PARTICULARLY WANT YOU TO KNOW:

Anyone who isn't exclusively heterosexual, lesbian or gay may call themselves bisexual – in other words anyone can be bisexual 'enough'.

There are enormous numbers of bisexuals in the world – probably over one third of the population – but most do not call themselves bisexual yet. We are all sorts of individuals; there is no bisexual 'type'.

Because of the effect of oppression, most of us bisexuals have internalised a message that 'I, as a bisexual, don't belong'. So, if you are our friends, please welcome us as we are into whichever group you belong to, and this will help us overcome our oppression.

For our part, as bisexuals, we need to communicate more so that bisexuality is more public and people get to know us face to face as individuals and not as a label to be oppressed. We need to inform people so that awareness and understanding replace the fear of bisexuality which arises from people's own emotional blocks against what they cannot handle or dislike in themselves. A growing bisexual network can help us overcome oppression so that liberation at both the personal and wider political level is progressively achieved.

'I think 'coming out' is terribly important, not only for lesbian, gay or bisexual people as individuals but also because, unless we come out as who and what we are, unless we show that we are not ashamed of our sexuality, that there's nothing to hide, unless we do that, the heterosexual majority is going to assume that our sexuality is something not to be talked about. I think they take their cue very much from us. If you are confident about who you are and what you are, if you are relaxed about it, then other people will think: oh well, it must be alright.'

Stephanie Norris

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